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CLAUDE-ACHILLE DEBUSSY

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LIVING MASTERS OF MUSIC
EDITED BY ROSA NEWMARCH

CLAUDE-ACHILLE DEBUSSY

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
From a painting by Jaques Blanche

CLAUDE-ACHILLE DEBUSSY

BY MRS. FRANZ LIEBICH

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

My best thanks are due to Mr. Granville Bantock for his kind loan of the piano score of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and to MM. A. Durand et Fils for the chronological list of M. Debussy's works at the end of this volume. My husband has all my gratitude for his unfailing help with the reading of difficult scores and for the long *tête-à-têtes* over the piano, during which we renewed acquaintance with some, and became intimate with all the compositions of this interesting and original composer. If this slight impressionist sketch of his life and work will serve to make M. Debussy's beautiful art-product in any way better known in England, the pleasure gained in writing it will be increased tenfold.

LOUISE LIEBICH

London, 1907.

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Music of the mystery, that embraces
All forest-depths and footless, far-off places.

LIONEL JOHNSON.

CLAUDE-ACHILLE DEBUSSY

CHAPTER I

"HAND AND SOUL"

"L'âme d'autrui est une forêt obscure où il fau marcher avec précaution." *—CLAUDE DEBUSSY.

THE keynote of the personality of Claude Debussy is struck at the outset of a sketch of his life and work by recording his intrinsic love of liberty and freedom. The logical outcome of this characteristic independent spirit is his consequent insistent claim to reticence and even silence regarding the intimate details of his career and existence. He has elected to shelter himself from publicity and advertisement, and already, on that account, a certain legendary atmosphere has wrapped itself around his name and fame. He is sometimes supposed to have enclosed himself within a self-constructed mental tower of ivory whence the visible world is no longer perceptible, and where the passions and emotions of ordinary men reach him only as echoes or shadowy dreams. Such statements, though they exaggerate his exceptional personality, are not without foundation. The power of inner sight, the perception of the

* Each individual soul is a dark forest where one should walk with cautious steps.

essence of things, are gifts rarely bestowed upon an individual without an accompanying love of solitude and seclusion. To the seer of visions a certain loneliness is inevitable. And above all to such a one the methods of those who only skim the surface of things must be naturally repugnant. But Debussy is not merely a dreamer of beautiful dreams; he is also a subtle psychologist who has penetrated into the deepest mysteries of the human heart, a magician with a keen knowledge of Nature's cryptic secrets, and he is pre-eminently a motive power in the life of many musicians of to-day. He has some disciples who are keenly appreciative and at the same time strongly individual, and he numbers not a few would-be imitators. But his original, unique style is inimitable.

It is possible to get a discriminating grasp of his characteristic qualities, but the task of placing him under the scalpel of analysis he has fortunately rendered impossible. And even were it feasible to play the part of "moral detective," should we be greatly the wiser? When all the little details of everyday life have been tabulated, and a classified list of foibles and virtues, of likes and dislikes, drawn up and annotated, are we any nearer the inner arcanum within the sanctuary of the soul? Supposing we had succeeded in nearing the threshold, should we not feel, in this case, on the point of committing what Debussy has so aptly styled *un crime de lèse-mystère?* The work of an artist is his best elucidation: it is the surest itinerary, the safest guide

through the dark forest of his soul. "Every work of imagination," writes M. Bourget, "is in its own degree an autobiography, lacking perhaps in substance, but at any rate intimately related to and deeply significative of our inner life." With M. Debussy we have access not only to his published compositions, but also to his writings on music and men and things. And according to his own method of criticism our investigations can be pursued. When M. Debussy was appointed musical critic in 1891 of the *Revue Blanche* he prefaced his remarks with the following words: "Having been invited to express my thoughts on the subject of music in this Review, I would like first to say a few words as to the procedure I intend to adopt. . . . I shall endeavour to trace in a musical work the many different emotions which have helped to give it birth, also to demonstrate its inner life; this will surely be accounted of greater interest than the game which consists in dissecting it as if it were a curious timepiece. Men in general forget that as children they were forbidden to dismember their puppets (it was even then a crime of *lèse-mystère*), but they still persist in poking their æsthetic noses where they are not wanted. If nowadays they have ceased to split open their play-things or toys, they still explain, dissect, and with cool indifference put an end to all mystery."

To a man of wide outlook, impatient of all restraint, enamoured of the unconditional and the inexplicable, the labelling of his moods and the docketing of his intentions must at all times seem insufferable.

Therefore it is well to quote Debussy's words on the subject of catchwords and coteries. In one of his many colloquies with an imaginary personage whom he named M. Croche, which appeared in the *Revue Blanche* of 1891, he thus expresses himself: "I ventured to say to him that men had essayed, some in poetry, others in painting (with difficulty I managed to add, and some in music), to shake off the accumulated dust of tradition, with the result of finding themselves labelled symbolists and impressionists, both of which terms are convenient to those who despise their fellow creatures." "They are journalists and tradesmen who treat others in this manner," rejoined M. Croche; "they are unimportant. A fine idea in process of formation is a worthy object of ridicule for imbeciles. But rest assured that there is a greater certainty of finding a true perception of beauty among those who are ridiculed than among the class of men resembling flocks of sheep who walk with docility in the direction of the slaughter-houses prepared for them by a clairvoyant fate." There is mordant irony contained in these sentences, but hardly enough to veil the shuddering of a sensitive soul ever eager for untrammelled freedom of action and liberty of thought. This independence of character is paralleled by an ardent love for the free, unrestrained life of the country, and by a strong passion for Nature in her many varied moods and phases. In another of his self-revelations effected through the medium of M. Croche he says; "Music is a sum total of scat-

tered forces. It is turned into a commercial speculation! I prefer to hear a few notes of an Egyptian shepherd's flute, for he is in accord with his scenery and hears harmonies unknown to your treatises. Musicians will only listen to music written by clever experts: they never turn their attention to that which is inscribed in Nature. It would benefit them more to watch a sunrise than to listen to a performance of the Pastoral Symphony.... Continue to be original, above suspicion. Methinks it spoils an artist to be greatly in sympathy with his surroundings; I am always afraid of his thus becoming merely the interpreter of his own *milieu*. One must seek restraint where freedom reigns, and not in the formulas of a worn and feeble philosophy. Go not to others for advice, but take counsel from the passing breezes, which relate the history of the world to those who listen."

In the unfolding of leaves in spring, in the waver ing winds and changing clouds, he finds "splendid object-lessons of liberty."

The following little pen-picture reveals the unaffected delight of the composer of the "Nocturnes" in beauty that is spontaneous and natural. It displays his keen observation of minute details, his taste for what is simple and unconventional, and his dislike of any pose or studied effect. "I lingered late one autumn evening in the country, irresistibly fascinated by the magic of old-world forests. From yellowing leaves fluttering earthwards celebrating the glorious agony of the trees, from the clamorous

angelus bidding the fields to slumber, rose a sweet persuasive voice counselling perfect oblivion. The sun was setting solitary, and not a single peasant thought of placing himself in a lithographic attitude in the foreground. Beasts and men turned peacefully homeward, having accomplished their impersonal tasks, regardless of encouragement or disapproval: this indifference lending a special charm to their united efforts and labour."

In another number of the *Revue Blanche* its composer-critic gives the readers notice that "on the Sunday when *Le Bon Dieu* is kind he will not listen to music"; and thus one particular fine Sunday in February he informed them that the weather was so propitious and the first rays of the sun so irresistible that he scorned any attempt whatever to induce him to attend no matter what kind of music. And elsewhere he remarks, *à propos* of his dislike to unnecessary applause at concerts: "Sachez donc bien qu'une véridique impression de beauté ne pourrait avoir d'autre effet que le silence. Enfin, voyons! quand vous assistez à cette féerie quotidienne qu'est la mort du soleil avez-vous jamais eu la pensée d'applaudir? Vous m'avouerez que c'est pourtant d'un developpement un peu plus imprevu que toutes vos petites histoires sonores."

If occasionally Debussy displays a caustic wit and a mordant pen, such qualifications have received their development from the circumstances of his later life. His early training was essentially conventional and academic, and seemingly in no way

conducive to the independent ideas he has formulated for himself. Born at St. Germain-en-Laye, August 22, 1862, he began his studies at that most conservative institution, the Paris Conservatoire. He obtained his *Solfège* medals in 1874, 1875, 1876, under Lavignac; a second prize for piano playing from Marmontel in 1877; a first prize for accompanying in 1880; an accessory prize for counterpoint and fugue in 1882; and finally, the Grand Prix de Rome with his cantata *L'Enfant Prodigue* in 1884, as a pupil of Guiraud. Thus it will be seen he not only assimilated his instruction carefully and completely, but gained his honours by slow degrees, step by step. And it is this patient overcoming of initial obstacles, this early unwearying attention to the technical difficulties of his art, that has given him the complete freedom he now enjoys in the unfolding of its evolutionary principles. How he brought "a flash of the will" to bear on the application of traditionary laws will be shown in a later chapter.

That he should have incurred suspicion from pedants, jealousy from mediocrities, and contempt from reactionary critics is a foregone conclusion. He has expressed his sentiments on the subject in the following terse and incisive words: "Je fais de la musique pour servir celle-ci le mieux qu'il m'est possible et sans autres préoccupations; il est logique qu'elle courre le risque de déplaire à ceux qui aiment 'une musique,' jusqu'à lui rester jalousement fidèles malgré ses rides et ses fards."*

* *Revue Blanche*, 1901.

Debussy's critical writings bear testimony to his knowledge and respect for the works of his predecessors. He has struck a new path, but only after having explored the whole length of the way which led him to it. He has written some delightful pages on the subject of the old classicists. *A propos* of J. S. Bach's violin concerto in G, he notes the "musical arabesques" contained in it. From these same arabesques the "ornament" is derived which he names the basis of all art modes. "The word 'ornament,'" he adds in parenthesis, "has no connection with the meaning attached to it by the musical grammars. The primitifs—Palestrina, Vittoria, Orlando di Lassus, &c." he continues, "were mindful of this divine 'arabesque.' They found its origin in the Gregorian chant, and they supported its slender convolutions by means of strong resisting counterpoint. When Bach returned to the use of the 'arabesque' he endowed it with greater elasticity and fluidity, and notwithstanding the severe discipline imposed on beauty by this great master, he gave it that free fantasy of reproductive movement which is still the wonder of our age." This paragraph is significant and helpful, as marking one of the founts from which Debussy derived some of his evolutionary principles and ideas.

For Weber and Rameau he has special predilections. The career of the old eighteenth-century French master bears some resemblance to that of his gifted successor. His innovations earned him the title of "*distillateur d'accords baroques.*" "I

believe," wrote Voltaire to Thiriot in 1735, *à propos* of Rameau's music, "that in the end the taste for Rameau will prevail in proportion to the nation's progress in musical knowledge. The ear improves little by little. In the course of three or four generations a change comes to the acoustic organs of a nation." This statement receives corroboration in the present century from M. Camille Mauclair. In a volume published three years ago, and entitled *Idées Vivantes*, this critic remarks that "recent works have demonstrated that the education of the eye and the ear has been gradual and progressive: contemporary music has developed the auditory faculties to a tenfold degree compared with those which served the hearers of the old chorales, and science, since Chevreuil, Helmholtz, Charles Henry Lippmann, proves to us that we shall soon perceive colours considered imperceptible up to the present by the human retina. . . . M. Debussy's music is a sonorous impressionism, and M. Monet's paintings are fugues of colour."

To Weber, Debussy is invincibly drawn by his love of the fantastic and by his power of describing it in music. He recognises that Weber was perhaps the first to concern himself with the affinity that exists between the unfathomable soul of Nature and the human soul. And most especially does he draw attention to the German composer's use of legend, "thus prognosticating the happy influence it would have on music."

In his choice of poets for his songs and for the different subjects he has suggested in music

M. Debussy has shown a comprehensive taste. From each he has chosen poems characteristic of his own predilections for what is delicately suggestive, intuitional, remote, and unsubstantial. He has been greatly influenced by the diaphanous poetry of Paul Verlaine, by the symbolism of Stéphane Mallarmé and his use of brilliant jewelled words. Many of Baudelaire's mysterious verses and Pierre Louys's "Songs of Bilitis" have had an attraction for him. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's rich imagery and mystic passion have appealed to him, and he has wedded his music to some of the work of Charles d'Orléans, Théodore de Banville, Paul Bourget, and others. In many of his instrumental and orchestral works he has been inspired directly by Nature. He has felt the haunting spell of her wayward beauty, and has transmuted some of her loveliness into sound. His quick sensibility enables him to seize the most delicate effects of light and shade, and he has rendered his art a plastic medium for recording fleeting impressions and fugitive glimpses. He sees the soul, the abstract principle underlying all things, and has given it embodiment through the medium of his music. His own art and that of painting are in some instances almost identical in method, for his employment of chords and their combinations resembles the manipulation of colours by a Le Sidaner, a Whistler, or a Manet.

Moreover, his procedure is entirely personal, and pre-eminently the expression of his unique individuality and of his manner of envisaging spiritual and

material things. Neither his psychic nor his visual imagery will appeal to those who have no affinity with his mental outlook. It is given to every listener to re-create, as it were, in his own mind the artist's conception. Those who are accustomed or addicted to strong colours and violent contrasts, and indifferent to delicate subtle suggestion, refinement, and spirituality, will have no affinity with M. Debussy's typical, original harmonies, fluid rhythm, free chord combinations, and elastic, flowing melodies. If we are always to accord him full belief, he is not greedy of contemporary favour, for he is accredited with the following remark: "Can you imagine anything greater than a man unknown through long centuries whose secret is accidentally deciphered? To have been one of these men—this is the highest honour Fame can bestow."

To one who has striven hand and soul, work is its own supreme reward and renown somewhat of a non-essential detail. "It is not possible to publish the *Suite Bergamesque*," wrote Debussy one day to M. Louis Laloy; "I am still in need of twelve bars for the Sarabande." And as none of his previous ideas had satisfied him, sooner than publish the piece with the slightest defect he preferred to wait patiently for the right inspiration. This attention and circumspection, this reverential feeling for perfection, are salient characteristics of the composer's finished work. And to these special qualities are added transparent truthfulness, sincerity, and consistency of thought and opinion. In conformity with his

dislike to ostentation and publicity is his obdurate refusal to be photographed. To a pressing request from the editor of *Le Monde Musical* for his likeness, on the morrow of the success of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, he answered, "Willingly, and you will receive the only one that has ever been taken. But I tell you beforehand—when I sat to the photographer I was two years old, and since then I have changed *a little!*"

The portrait used as frontispiece to this volume is taken from the picture by M. Jacques Blanche. It was exhibited at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1903, and at the International Society at the New Gallery, London, in 1907.

The eyes are those of the visionary: of a warm brown; deep set, kindly; they have the abstract, thoughtful, inward look of the seer. The rather heavy moustache and beard scarcely hide the full, sensuous lips. In the mouth and eyes, in the firm set of the head on the strong, broad shoulders, in the energetic, nervous hand and easy unstudied attitude one discerns the ingenuous *bonhomie* of the independent artistic temperament allied to deep-seated idealism, acute sensibility and epicurean fastidiousness.

Unapproachable as he is to strangers, M. Debussy is popular with his intimates by reason of his geniality, his humour, his fantastic imagination and rare gifts. On certain occasions, in his infrequent excursions into society, he has delighted the assembled guests by his powers of improvisation,

and if in the right mood he will treat his hearers to a wonderful display of tonal impressionism, weaving iridescent chords and harmonies into a fantastic web of colour and brilliancy.

Of late years he has absented himself more frequently than usual from his charmingly situated Parisian residence in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. Circumstances have enabled him to gratify his love of travel to its full bent, and he avails himself of every opportunity to see as much as possible of his own beautiful France and of other picturesque countries.

If from his own utterances, by deduction from some of his expressed convictions and sentiments, a slight idea of the character of this original composer has been gained, such a glimpse will help in some degree towards an elucidation of his artistic method. If we accept the definition that music is the art of combining sounds for the purpose of expressing feeling, for eliciting emotion, or recording impressions, it follows that the form and complexity of the different combinations and the manner of using them depends more or less upon the personality of the composer.

In a study of the creations of the most advanced pioneer in modern musical art his hand will be seen directed by his soul, and his work will be found to be the objective realisation of his exceptional mind.

CHAPTER II

MODUS OPERANDI

> . . . a flash of the will that can,
> Existent behind all laws . . .
>
> R. BROWNING.

WHEN as a youth M. Debussy was serving with his regiment at Evreux, according to his own statement he took great delight in listening to the overtones of bugles and bells. The former sounded over the camp for the various military duties; the latter belonged to a neighbouring convent, and rang out daily the hours of ritual and divine office. The sonorous resonances of the bugles and the far-reaching vibrations of the bells, falling upon the sensitive ear of the young musician in the shape of upper partial tones or harmonics, were keenly observed by him and annotated for future use. It is his application of the laws of harmony to these infinitely complicated intervals and his frequent employment of them in his compositions, unrelated and unresolved, that has partly earned him the title of revolutionist from a section of the public opposed to all artistic progress and evolution. But as M. de la Laurencie has aptly expressed it, "A revolution is merely an

evolution rendered apparent." It is unnoticed as long as its progress remains obscured and silent; but if it eventually forces itself upon those who have remained unobservant of its continuity, its appearance seems sudden and unwarranted. Guyau has justly remarked that all art commences with the conventional, the ceremonial, the marvellous, from which it emancipates itself by degrees: in its approaches towards perfection it frees itself from conventional trammels and gains correspondingly in expression.* Music is governed by the same laws as nature: it cannot hark back on itself; and a musician gifted with a powerful personality needs must create his own language in which to utter the manifold feelings, emotions, and ideas surging within him. To such a man success will come slowly. If his method is in advance of and at variance with the established formulas of the day, it will naturally meet with antagonism from those whose opinions and notions are deep-rooted in the heavy soil of prejudice and custom. It would be invidious to quote the numerous examples of individuals around whom the different eddies of theoretical contradiction and abuse have swirled. It is sufficient to call attention to the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, all of which have breasted the many tides of opposition and are now reposing high and dry upon the mainland of public favour and esteem.

The cleverest psychologists as well as writers on æsthetics have forcibly developed the theory that a

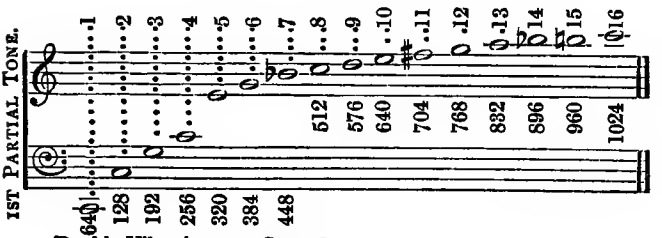
* Guyau: "L'Irréligion de l'Avenir."

musical auditor reproduces in his own brain the work he is listening to. "Whoever," observes M. Ribot, "experiences immaturely or acutely any degree of æsthetic emotion, be he spectator, auditor, or dilettante, re-creates according to the extent of his own power the work of the creator. Unless some slight sympathy exists between the two, the spectator will remain indifferent; he must re-live the life of the creative artist and discover his *modus operandi*, so that, though incapable himself of achievement, he may assimilate readily and competently."* We have seen in the last chapter how by close and earnest study M. Debussy has rendered himself a thorough master of the technique of his art; we will now endeavour to study the special conditions he has imposed upon musical laws, and ascertain how by a "flash of the will" he has moulded them and made them subservient to his purposes.

It is well known that every sound or tone is accompanied by a series of others, more acute, named harmonics, the sonorous oscillations of which correspond, from the point of view of number and frequency, to the fragmentary parts of the vibrations resulting from the fundamental note. Music has been defined in its essence as "an ascension from the abysses of silence towards sounds which are continually tending to become more incisive and acute." Harmonics or overtones were first pointed out in the seventeenth century by Mersenne, explained by the French physicist Sauveur in 1701,

* Ribot: "Psychologie des Sentiments."

and made by Rameau the basis of his musical system. The natural harmonics of a fundamental tone, C for example, form the following series, which is carried on to the sixteenth overtone or harmonic :



Double Vibrations per Second.

In Claude Debussy's compositions his system of harmony and tonality is intimately connected with these laws of natural harmonics. Up to the present the seventh harmonic (B flat) is about the limit of exploited intervals used by most contemporary composers. The æsthetic value of chords derived from these intervals and their inversions is found in the sensation of consonance and dissonance resulting from these combinations. This feeling is entirely subjective, and in the course of centuries has undergone a slow but certain evolution. For instance, the following intervals are generally admitted to be consonances : ($\frac{2}{1}$) an octave, ($\frac{3}{2}$) a fifth, and ($\frac{4}{3}$) a fourth ; while from the ninth century to the present the major third ($\frac{5}{4}$) has been evolved ; also the minor third ($\frac{6}{5}$), the seventh ($\frac{7}{4}$), and the ninth ($\frac{9}{4}$). As use is made of the harmonics farthest away from the ground tone the intervals became more and more

complicated. Thus Debussy, remembering his youthful observations of resonances produced by bugles and bells, has employed numberless sonorous aggregations to be found in the assemblage of chords constituting what is called natural dissonances : chords entirely composed of harmonics. Such chords as those of the dominant seventh, the diminished seventh, the ninth, which on account of their compound nature are dispensed from "preparation," have hitherto of necessity been resolved, and in their resolutions a certain amount of licence has been permitted. Thus they are on the borderland of consonance and dissonance, and point the way to a still greater freedom of treatment. Debussy has used these chords without resolution of any kind, and has employed them as resonances or consonances. His compositions swarm with chords of the seventh and their derivatives ; one finds in them successions of fifths and ninths mostly derived from natural harmonics of the dominant ; and, what is especially noticeable, they are employed by him on each of the seven degrees of the scale. It follows from this method that the idea of tonality in its present condition, with its major and minor modes, is somewhat insufficient to M. Debussy. As M. Marnold has demonstrated, his music presupposes the existence of a third mode, which this critic has named the "diminished major," and which is characterised by the alteration of the fifth (B, D, F) instead of B, D, F♯. In an exceedingly interesting essay by the above-mentioned writer on

M. Debussy's "Nocturnes" he has indicated the gradual evolution of the auditory faculty by an able analogy, drawn from different scientific sources, between the evolutionised functions of the ear and those of the eye. He says that if musicians have at first utilised the simplest possible combinations of sound to arrive by a continual and gradual evolution to the most complicated, it is because they could not do otherwise; for the progress from simplicity to complexity is a general and constitutional law of our own nature, the effects of which are nowhere so tangible and irrefutable as in the relation of our senses to external phenomena. He quotes at some length from the works of a learned German, Dr. Hugo Magnus.* This clever scientist has made a profound study of the historic evolution of the sense of colour, and for this purpose he has described the successive phases in men's minds of that immutable phenomenon of nature, the rainbow. He has thus ascertained that at first it was thought to be all of one colour. Homer distinguishes it as purple. Later Xenophon defined "what is called Iris, a purple cloud, red and yellow-green." Two centuries later Aristotle sees three colours, red, green and blue, and he adds, "Between the red and the green sometimes yellow is discerned."

After a lapse of three hundred years Ovid recognises in the rainbow "a thousand dazzling colours which the eye cannot distinguish separately." Still

* "Die geschichtliche Entwickelung des Farbensinnes," Leipzig, 1877.

Aristotle's tricolour division persists until the thirteenth century, but emendated by the observation of an infinity of intermediary nuances of which artists have not succeeded in giving an exact reproduction (Vitello). M. Marnold points out conclusively that this evolution of the colour-sense follows closely the order of colours in the solar spectrum, commencing with red, the colour engendered by the smallest number of ethereal vibrations. Parallel with this progressive perception of colours and hues is the corresponding increasing classifying of intervals into dissonances and consonances.* By degrees and in the order of natural harmonics or partial tones the following intervals have been adopted: The octave, $\frac{2}{1}$; the fifth, $\frac{3}{2}$; the fourth, $\frac{4}{3}$; the major and minor thirds, $\frac{5}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{5}$; and finally the major and minor sevenths. In the time of the *organum*, which was the earliest attempt at polyphonic music, beginning in the sixth and lasting until the eleventh century, the octave, the fifth, and the fourth were adopted as consonances, and are thus the basis of all our harmonic evolution. It has been remarked by the Rev. J. A. Zahm, in his work on "Sound and Music," that the fact of these three intervals having a physical basis in the partials of compound notes may probably account for the manner of tuning the earliest forms of the Greek lyre. According to Boethius, the lyre was to the time of Orpheus an instrument of four strings, whose intervals would be represented by the notes C, F, G, C2. From the

* *Courrier Musical*, May 1, 1902.

earliest times to the present day the question of consonances and dissonances has been an agitating one. The interval that follows logically in the series of natural harmonics is the third. It made its appearance during the lifetime of Guido of Arezzo, in the eleventh century, but was used at first very sparingly. Not only was it considered a dissonance, but its employment was looked upon as a symptom of degeneration. Controversy regarding the character of thirds and sixths lasted until the fifteenth century, and not until the sixteenth century were these intervals and those of the fourth and fifth recognised as prescriptive and classic. At present our ears, sharpened by experience, are able to appreciate a more and more complex system of harmony and to discern the effects of more and more rapid vibrations. As there are rays of the spectrum as yet unseen, so we may conclude that coming generations will hear and combine overtones the sonorous vibrations of which are as yet unheard by our contemporaries. From these remarks Debussy's relative standpoint to the past and future of the art of music is clearly discernible. But if his chord combinations must be styled of ultra-modern construction, he is nevertheless equally beholden to antiquity for a great deal of his original tone colouring. If his scales are repeatedly devoid of leading note, and if the minor seventh frequently takes the place of the more usual major seventh (which is contrary to our diatonic system), it is because these scales are derived from the old church modes known

as mixolydian in the major and Dorian in the minor. This use of ancient scales, of which there are eight in number, has given an indescribable charm to Debussy's music, and has endowed it with a quaint, archaic grace. In the opening bars of *La Demoiselle élue*, in parts of *Pelléas and Mélisande*, in the *Songs of Bilitis*, one comes across a quiet, restrained beauty of utterance, seeming to originate from an older source than even Gregorian chant, carrying one back to early Christian hymnology, which in its turn was taken either from the Hebrew temple service or from the Greeks. Those who look askance at this composer's art on account of what they choose to call its modernity are little aware of the half-truth they utter. I will venture to say that an earnest and prolonged study of his compositions will convey to an unprejudiced mind a greater knowledge of ancient music and of the gradual evolution of harmony and style than any dry-as-dust theoretical treatise. It is a link between the old-world past and the present, and in all likelihood will eventually guide us back to a purer taste and to a reaction from the realistic, flamboyant, adventitious methods of certain contemporary composers

The time-honoured territory of Gregorian chant has been retrodden by other modern musicians: Berlioz, Liszt, Fauré, Vincent d'Indy have employed its language, and it is easy to detach examples from their works. Debussy alone has, so to speak, fertilised the soil of his efforts with the rich loam of

its influence. It is therefore so inextricably interwoven into his compositions that its detection requires minute attention. It has given his music a greater fluidity, a freer rhythm, a refinement, a richness, and a variety all its own. This heritage of old-world music is peculiar to the Latin races. Its ramification can be traced in ancient Celtic music, especially in Irish folk-song. Its sober melody has been heard in Gallic churches since the Middle Ages. Even in the out-of-the-way Breton villages the inhabitants will sing the liturgy, in unison, to a simplified mode of the old Gregorian chant. In Italy, with the exception of Perosi, Gregorian modes have not been used by composers. This is accounted for by the fact that for a considerable time the operatic style has held almost undisputed sovereignty all over this country, and even its church music has been accordingly theatrical and meretricious.

If we can trace impressions of early life in Debussy's music by his employment of the old modes, the sounds of which were familiar to him from boyhood, we can also find many other indications in his work of the influences and circumstances of his later surroundings. As a student in Rome he threw himself ardently into the study of the music of Russian composers, especially that of Moussorgsky, and there are marks of the Oriental colouring derived from these masters in his orchestral and instrumental works. Later, a visit to Russia strengthened his love and knowledge of these original musicians. On his return to Paris, his mind

received the imprint of his environment. He made himself familiar with the *chefs-d'œuvre* of the poets, artists and *littérateurs* of the day. He experienced the vibrating currents of Paris opinions. He became acquainted with its dominating tastes and seething passions, and he acquired a knowledge of the prevalent pessimistic attitude of some of his contemporaries dissatisfied with society and with themselves. In spite of these conflicting tendencies, he has maintained his personal independence of intellect, and from the taint of morbid influences—from which his music is singularly free—he has been saved by his inherent love of Nature and of liberty of mind and thought. He has discerned what M. Brunetière called the "correspondances" existing between Nature and the human soul. And he has shown how indubitably he has mastered not only Nature's intimate secrets, but also the fact that all human passions, feelings and aspirations are mirrored in one or other phenomenon of her varied aspects of sky and earth and air.

By inclination and temperament Debussy is in close sympathy with the school of painters called impressionists and with the class of poets styled symbolists. To the former belong, taking a few names at random, such artists as Monet, Manet, Fantin Latour, Renoir, Dégas, Sisley, Pissarro, Whistler, Le Sidaner. Their art approaches intimately that of music by reason of its research of colour-harmonies causing their pictures to resemble a symphony with the most luminous degree of light

as principal theme. As M. Debussy's work has been designated musical impressionism, a glance at the methods of these artists will not be out of place. It is indisputable that there are points of resemblance between their work and his, but at the same time, like his personality, his individual art is affranchised from precedent and category, cliques or coteries.

Taking as basis of their method the fact that in Nature, colour does not exist independently of itself, but is evolved from the action of the solar light, the art of the impressionist painters is a series of presentations of the infinite modifications of colour given to objects at different times and seasons by the action of light on their surface. According to the greater or lesser obliquity of the solar rays, the variations of colour occur. Hence the close study by these artists of the atmosphere which intervenes between these several objects and themselves. The eye is thus made more and more subtle, for as Manet said, "Le personnage principal d'un tableau c'est la lumière"; and Carrière remarked, "Un tableau est le developpement logique de la lumière." Colour thus engenders the picture. "Colour being simply the irradiation of light, it follows," writes M. Camille Mauclair, "that every colour is composed of the very elements of the solar light, that is to say, of the seven tones of the spectrum. It is well known that these seven tones appear to us dissimilar on account of the inequality in the rapidity of the luminous waves. The hues in Nature, like those of the

spectrum, differ to us also in appearance for the same reason. Colours vary according to the intensity of light. An object is not determined by a specific colour, but by the more or less rapid vibration of the light on its surface and this rapidity depends, as demonstrated by optics, on the inclination of the solar rays, which, according as they are vertical or oblique, give light and colour in different degrees." *

It has been often a subject of regret with some and for abuse by others that the art of the impressionists has been sometimes devoted to commonplace and even sordid subjects. But it must be remembered that their movement was a reaction against the artificial petrified methods of the classicists, academists, and romanticists; and if the recoil was, at times, extreme, its causes necessitated energetic action.

Prominent among the supporters of these courageous artists stand the names of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. From the former Debussy has borrowed several poems, and from the latter the subject of one of his most important works, the eclogue named by its author, *L'après-midi d'un faune.* Together with Henri de Régnier, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, André Theuriet, Armand Silvestre, Verlaine, and many others, these poets have been named severally Parnassiens, Symbolists, Decadents, according to the different idiosyncrasies of their respective admirers or detractors. And Debussy

* "L'Impressionisme: les hommes, les idées et les œuvres," Camille Mauclair.

has had his share of the appellatives. Though some sense can be extracted from the two first-named of these literary missiles, that of decadent, though it serves its purpose as a linguistic brickbat, has little or no meaning. It has often been asked where decadence begins in any history of literature? It has been demonstrated that Virgil might be a decadent with regard to Ennius, Lucan to Virgil, Claudian or Ausonius to Lucan. According to such a procedure "Homer," said Villiers de l'Isle Adam, "would be a decadent poet." The title of Parnassiens was derived from a fantastic review founded by M. Catulle Mendès. Later some of its less precise and more intuitive contributors were termed symbolists, for the reason that their art partook of the allusive, evocative nature of symbols. Their aim was to resemble music by appealing to the emotions and by leaving a wide margin of suggestion for the imagination to work on and define. By their use of symbolic meaning the signification of a poem could not only be understood in several ways by different readers, but the poet's ideas were endowed with a plastic, coloured, vibrating existence capable of being developed in the reader's mind, and thus equalling in effect the prolonged harmonics or overtones of a rich chord or combination of chords. In Debussy's music these characteristics of impressionism and symbolism are prominently marked. He employs sounds as colours and blends them in varied juxtaposition, forming them into delicately tinted sonorous aggregations;

or he invests certain chords with an existence either sufficient unto itself or renders it capable of germinating and developing a series of shaded, many-hued chord sequences. Fluid, flexible, vivid, these beautiful harmonies, seemingly woven of refracted rays of light, merge into infinite melody of a free, flowing rhythm. "Tout est mélodie dans sa musique," says M. Vincent d'Indy. It approximates to the art of the symbolists by its appeal to the imagination, by its power of suggesting the most subtle soul-states, and by its gift of evoking the magic atmosphere of legend and dream. In spite of these affinities, Debussy is especially averse to becoming merely "the interpreter of his *milieu*," for, as he also says, "it spoils an artist to be greatly in sympathy with his surroundings." It is indeed impossible, in these days of rapid communication, to keep aloof from current thought and opinion; neither would it be beneficial for an artist were such an attitude practicable. Debussy has struck the balance between two extremes. While fully cognisant of the different influences which are moulding present-day thought and action, and while allowing his fancy to roam at will, he has passed each innovation through the alembic of his brain, and in the process it has become suffused with his own individual qualities and ideas. Though he has initiated a new style in music, he has as yet founded no particular school; neither does he seem to have any wish so to do.

One of the cleverest of a brilliant group of contemporary French critics has remarked that during

the period which extends from César Franck to Claude Debussy almost a complete page of musical history has inscribed itself in France.* The end of the nineteenth century has certainly witnessed a Renaissance in French music. The movement is racy of the soil ; it is entirely emancipated from the impress of Germany in general and Wagner in particular. Its influence is already spreading, and can be traced in the efforts of the younger school of American and English musicians. In America, especially, great attention is being paid to all that appertains to the art in France : the result has been beneficial, with no detriment to the original individual work which is being produced. In England a knowledge of French orchestral and chamber music is on the increase, but the operas and many of the finer *chefs-d'œuvre* of French composers have not yet been given the opportunity of a hearing. In one or two instances a somewhat too slavish imitation of Debussy's method has had the usual inefficacious result. In others judicious assimilation joined to strong idiosyncrasy has helped to create a more personal style, and the paramount Wagnerian obsession has been banished. However, it is premature either to talk of emulating or copying Debussy. As he is still in the prime of life, there is no knowing to what developments his genius may lead him. And to speak, as some have already done, of his successors, and of the ends to which his theories may ultimately lead others, is both precipi-

* Lionel de la Laurencie : "Le gôut musical en France," 1905.

tate and unprofitable. We may trace the many complex windings of the scattered influences which have tended to modify the technical side of his work, but his inimitable, original art will still remain elusive and mysterious; for, apart from theoretical ideas and formulas lending themselves willingly to the scalpel of analysis, there remains to be noted that "flash of the will that can, existent behind all laws," which defies all scrutiny. In the following examination of Debussy's compositions this lambent flame may be discerned shedding its light over their workmanship. It can be apprehended by the heart and by the intuitive faculties, while the mind and intelligence are intent on the laws upon which it casts its radiant beams.

CHAPTER III

CHORAL, ORCHESTRAL AND INSTRUMENTAL WORKS

> "The knowledge that will hold good in working, cleave thou to that; . . . the rest is yet all a hypothesis of knowledge, a thing to be argued of in schools. . . ."—CARLYLE.

THERE is a curious resemblance between the two introductory bars of *L'Enfant Prodigue* and *Pelléas et Mélisande,* but otherwise there is little premonition in this initial work of the specific qualities of Debussy's later compositions. In 1884 it gained him the Prix de Rome at the Paris Conservatoire. He was then twenty-two years of age. It was in the form of a cantata for soli and chorus, and the words were by E. Guiraud. It contains duets, trios, and a piquantly written *cortège* and dance. The melodic speech of *Pelléas et Mélisande* is foreshadowed in the semi-recitative used in the cantata, in so far as a great deal of it follows the inflections of the speaking voice. The Prix de Rome served to widen the young composer's visual and mental horizon by enabling him to pursue his studies in a foreign country. Later, alluding to the prize, it is recorded

that he remarked that the fact of having gained it resolved itself into the question of ascertaining whether or not a student had talent; and admitting that it facilitated travel in Italy, or even Germany, he asks why migration should be restricted to these two countries. However, he determined at all costs to gratify his own latent, nomadic tastes, and after the prescribed course of study in Rome he returned for a while to Paris, and went subsequently to Russia, employing his time while there in giving lessons to some wealthy young Russians. It was during this course of instruction that he found many opportunities of listening to the string bands of the gipsies. From these genuine Nature-musicians and their free improvisations he derived vivid impressions, and he has stated that he gained great advantages by studying their simple spontaneous musical utterance. The influence of the these open-air instrumentalists, of their wild, strange rhythms, and of their primitive folk-songs can be traced in parts of his Quatuor, and in portions of his Nocturnes, in *L'après-midi d'un faune*, and many of his piano pieces.

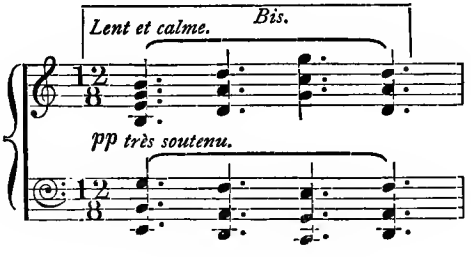
From Rome Debussy forwarded to the Société des Beaux Arts in Paris his first symphonic suite entitled *Printemps*. It is an evocation of the spirit of spring, and its delicately tinted harmonies are precursors of some of the effective Nature touches in *Pelléas* and in certain of the songs. It was examined and judged by MM. Ambroise Thomas, Charles Gounod, Léo Delibes, Reyer, Massenet, and Saint-Saëns. A verdict of undue modernity was

given by these arbiters of taste. They deemed it insufficiently precise in form and design. The following year a second composition named *La Demoiselle élue*, was sent from Italy by the young composer to his native city. The work was inspired by D. G. Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel," and entitled a lyrical poem for female voices and orchestra. Just at that time the Pre-Raphaelite movement had an appreciable vogue in Paris. Its influence was never widespread, but many of the younger poets and artists were fascinated and swayed by the ideas and opinions of the Brotherhood. A prose translation was made of the poem by Gabriel Sarrazin. By many critics it is considered Rossetti's finest and most characteristic work. In 1881 he gave Mr. Hall Caine an account of its origin as deriving from his perusal and admiration of Edgar Poe's "Raven." "I saw" (this is Mr. Caine's version of Rossetti's statement) "that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and I determined to reverse the conditions and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven." *

In its French dress the "Blessed Damozel" has lost a great deal of its unique charm. Rossetti's beautiful words, always chosen with infinite care and selected with due regard to loveliness of sound, by the very nature of their strong individuality are unresponsive to any foreign treatment. Composed

* D. G. Rossetti, Letters and Memoir, 2 vols. 1895. W. M. Rossetti.

when the poet-painter was nineteen years of age, it is written with spontaneous felicity of expression, and is simple and direct in manner. But though some of the quaint, archaic phraseology cannot adequately be reproduced in another language, the spirit of the poem has been well conceived by the translator and still more wonderfully transcribed in Debussy's music. He has captured the poet's delicate imagery, and set it with a minute attention to precise detail worthy of a Pre-Raphaelite painting, altogether different to the style of his later works. The composition opens with one of his characteristic melodic themes. Two curvilinear groups of common chords evoke, in a manner similar to the initial theme of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a feeling of remoteness and of mystery. A solemn chant



followed by an expressive lyrical melody, pensive and sweet, forms the introductory orchestral prelude. A chorus of sopranos then describe in flexible, fluid cadences the appearance of the Blessed Damozel at the "gold bar of heaven." The second verse is sung in recitative to an accompaniment of broken

arpeggios. A selection of the next nine verses of the poem are sung by the *récitante* and chorus respectively, and then in melodic speech accents the Damozel's words are sung by a soprano. Especially beautiful is the moment when

> The light thrilled through her, fill'd
> With angels in strong level flight.

The orchestration is then of ethereal delicacy. The appearance of the luminous heavenly *cortège* is wonderfully well portrayed, as also when it has passed and "their path

> Was vague in distant spheres,"

This lambent procession may possibly have suggested to the composer the brilliant cavalcade which passes through and mingles with the aerial *fêtes* in the second movement of the Nocturnes. At the close of the *Demoiselle élue* the pensive introductory melody reappears, and is especially expressive of the final dejected attitude of the Blessed Damozel leaning on the golden barrier, weeping, with her face between her hands. As the composition is solely for female voices, the lover's verses are not set to music, and his concluding comment, "I heard her tears," is therefore omitted, and only suggested at the end of a short orchestral epilogue by the combined voices singing an interjectory "Ah!" on the chord of C major.

The learned critics at the Académie des Beaux-Arts styled Rossetti's poem obscure, and though they considered its musical adaptation not devoid

of poetry and charm, they declared they still recognised in it the composer's systematic tendency towards vagueness of expression, a form of utterance with which they had previously had occasion to reproach him. But in the case of the *Demoiselle élue* they believed it was justified to a certain extent by the indefinite character of the subject. Clearly the examiners did not belong to the section of the French public whose accomplishments included an appreciation of Pre-Raphaelitism and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry. However, though possibly uncongenial to the examiners, the poem was well adapted to appeal to Debussy's love of abstract reverie. He has always manifested a remarkable consistency in his choice of objective themes whereon to exercise his art. In the first number of his *Proses lyriques* he has essayed to portray, both in his own words and in music, the intangible substance of a waking dream. He ends with these significative words: "My soul is encompassed with old-world dreams."

Realising as he does the unlimited power of suggestion, possessed by the art of music and understanding in a very subtle degree its capability of giving a fleeting existence to immaterial, abstract ideas he has invariably chosen delicate, intangible subjects and flights of fancy which gain pre-eminently an added and prolonged eloquence in music. To those who would attempt to define the unknowable, and who would limit the arts to precise expression or imitation of what they call

realities, Debussy's choice of poets, his association of ideas in music, even his Nature studies and impressions, must seem antagonistic and incomprehensible. He is averse to binding music down to the exact reproduction of set programmes, but has rather chosen to amplify and expand evanescent, shadowy thoughts—to distil their essence and then capture and protract it in sound. His best-known work in England and America, and one that has elicited a great deal of conflicting criticism, the Prélude *L'après-midi d'un faune*, is based on the work of a poet whose temperament and idiosyncrasies are singularly akin to his own. Stéphane Mallarmé struck out an individual line in literature and followed it in spite of raillery and contempt from a number of his contemporaries, remaining content with the homage and respect of a cultured few and the consciousness of his own sincerity and unfailing loyalty to a cherished ideal. He endeavoured to formulate a poetic art which would embody with perfect harmony a medley of dissimilar emotions and ideas. He intended each of his verses to convey at one and the same time a plastic image, an expression of a thought, the enunciation of a sentiment and a philosophical symbol; it was to be subordinate to the strictest rules of prosody, so as to form a perfect whole, and thus to depict the complete transfiguration of a state of the soul.* Mallarmé's poems appeal to the reader's intuition and sensibility quite as much as to his intelligence. He needs to discern the

* Theodor de Wyzewa: "Nos Maîtres."

vibrations, as it were, of the poet's thought; to discover the underlying strata that gave it form, and to catch some faint echo of the Infinite embodied in the Finite idea. The research of the ideal, the artist's vision and conception of beauty and truth, the analysing of this vision and of these abstract concepts, are the familiar subjects of Mallarmé's poems. He is in accord with Carlyle, and "everywhere finds himself encompassed with symbols . . .; the universe is to him but one vast symbol of God;" and in the universe he has searched for the intimate correlation and interdependence of all things. As the sun transfigures objects in its golden light, so the imagination, or poet's vision, the evocation of old-world dreams, idealises this material age of utility and ugliness.

L'après-midi d'un faune is an encomium in verse of the imperishable dominion of fancy and dream and of the artist's power to evolve a world of his own from his artistic creations. These subjective thoughts are given an archaic setting and are made objective in the illusions of a mythological faun. A cursory glance at this extremely difficult symbolic poem, the conventional association of ideas connecting a faun with antcis, Debussy's unusual harmonies and progressions, and prejudiced criticisms consigning music and poem to the void and the inane were, of necessity, in the natural order of events. With a few rough strokes the poem can thus be outlined. A faun is lying on the borderland of waking and sleeping in a grove. The atmosphere is palpitating with the golden

mid-day heat of an Eastern day. He has seen some white, slender-limbed, light-footed nymphs flit by: he would perpetuate the lovely vision. But he asks himself, Am I in love with a dream? Fully awake, he begins to reflect and analyse. He dissects the sensations and emotions he has experienced; questions the truth of the dream; recalls it again and again. His efforts remain fruitless. The tawny brilliant sunlight of reality has dispelled all illusion. His thoughts become exaggerated, distorted; his senses predominate. Delicate imagery had erstwhile taken shape in his mind: had he seen a flight of swans? A full-blown rose prefigures the culmination of his dream; a bunch of amber-coloured grapes is emblematic of the lost illusion: bereft of their contents, he would inflate their empty skins and watch the sun's rays glinting through them. The current of his ideas become more and more realistic; at last he imagines himself under the shadow of Etna with Venus in his arms. And while he is anticipating punishment for such desecration sleep visits his eyelids once more; he bids adieu to waking facts and reality and in the shades of oblivion will he go in rightful quest of the shadowy, vanished dream. In this slight, pallid sketch of a poem replete with rich imagery and vivid colour the faun can be taken as symbolic of the artist; the dream-nymphs: inspiration. The creative impulse, the artist's response to ideal inspired thought, is represented as blighted and blurred by analysis in the pitiless waking light of mid-day reality; and the artist's realisation

of beauty is understood to be correspondence with his own interior vision of truth. This interpretation is an individual one, and can be controverted or amplified and modified according to personal predilections; for the signification of the poem is wide and elastic.

Mallarmé's method of employing single isolated words in his text resembles Debussy's use of unrelated detached chords. The words, like the chords, scintillate like jewels; in the poem they are charged with symbolic meaning. Debussy has named his setting of this eclogue a *prélude symphonique.* It is therefore hardly to be considered as programme music, except in the sense of suggesting some of the main features of the poem. The ascending and descending introductory bars given out by an unaccompanied flute convey an idea of pastoral charm. A characteristic bucolic horn motif follows, and the first theme is repeated with muted string accompaniment. The whole scoring of the composition is of cobweb delicacy. The orchestra is composed of three flutes, oboes, clarinets, four horns, two harps, antique cymbals, and strings. The principal themes are given by clarinets, oboes, and harps respectively. A scale of whole tones is heard on the clarinet; this leads to another section, marked *piu animato,* in which the oboe voices the principal theme. These subjects are all interwoven with and linked to other themes. They are heard sometimes as solos, sometimes concerted. The rhythm of the whole work is free and varied. The

strings, muted or otherwise, are often used as a kind of background to the wind solos, which is most effective. A veil of palpitating heat seems to be suffused over the composition, and corresponds to the glow of Eastern sunlight in the poem and also to the remote, visionary nature of the poet's imagery and fancies. The tone poem also recalls the golden noon of an idyl of Theocritus. All through the piece the composer preserves this feeling of elusiveness, of mirage: he attains it by the use of delicate unusual harmonies and by the silvery, web-like tracery of his phrases. The frequent use of the scale of whole tones and the unresolved dissonances produce a distinct charm of their own. The chords are of exceeding richness and present a depth of glowing colour. The interspersed solos for violin, oboe, clarinet, cor anglais, resemble dainty broidery, and portray intimately the ramifications of doubt and longing in the faun's mind, which he likens to a multitude of branches with slender pointed sprays and sprigs.

In his next orchestral work, published in 1890, M. Debussy has poetised in sound some of Nature's most ethereal and imponderable phenomena. The transient appearance of clouds, the intangible fabric of their aerial architecture, their kaleidoscopic colouring, and the universal rhythm prevalent in the infinitesimal atoms and electrons of the ambient air have been utilised to exemplify the mystery of creation and the analogy between its phantasmagoria and the human heart and

soul. There are many, no doubt, who would call the *Nocturnes* programme music, and who might imagine them to be merely descriptive of the outward aspects of Nature. The scanty notes prefixed by the composer to the programmes on the occasion of the first performance in Paris of this symphonic work are not meant to be taken *au pied de la lettre.* They outline or sketch an impression of an impression. They may indicate the association of ideas in Debussy's mind, but each separate listener is at liberty to develop the ideas and to discern for himself all the imagery and symbolism issuing from the more obvious analogies. The printed score has no explanatory analysis. Its sub-titles are: *Nuages, Fêtes, Sirènes* (16 *voix de femmes*). The following slight elucidation was affixed to the initial prospectus of the work:

"The title of nocturnes is to be interpreted in a wider sense than that usually given to it, and most especially is it understood as having a decorative meaning. Therefore the usual form of nocturne has not been considered, and the word is to be accepted as signifying in the amplest manner diversified impressions and special lights.

"*Nuages* (clouds): the unchanging aspect of the sky, and the slow, solemn movement of the clouds dissolving in grey tints lightly touched with white.

"*Fêtes* (festivities): the restless dancing rhythm of the atmosphere interspersed with sudden flashes of light. There is also an incidental procession (a dazzling imaginary vision) passing through and

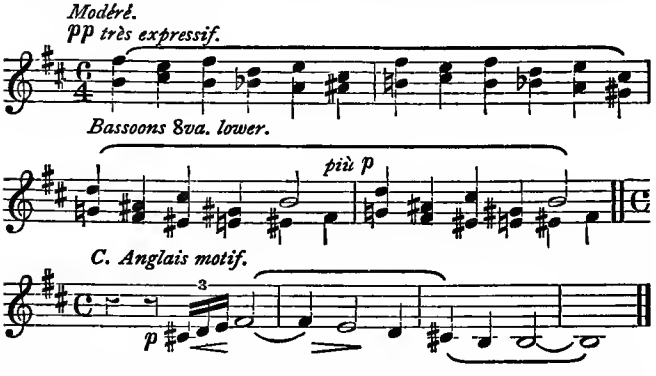
mingling with the aerial revelry ; but the background of uninterrupted festival is persistent with its blending of music, and luminous dust participating in the universal rhythm of all things.

"*Sirènes* (sirens) : the sea and its perpetual rhythm, and then amid waves silvered by moonbeams is heard the laughter and mysterious song of passing sirens."

Those words, suggestive rather than expository, convey a very precise idea of the proximity of Debussy's mind and soul to the "time-vesture of God," which is Nature. The great interpretative painter of rural life, J. F. Millet, expressed the wish to make others hear "the songs, the silences, the rustlings of the air." He longed to make them see all that he saw. Through the medium of sound Debussy has accomplished a little of what the French painter aspired to and in a way achieved. He has made himself one with elemental things, and from their secret lore he has woven this tone poem, in which he also has essayed to disclose to others something of the mystery that underlies the objective existence of all things. But if the thoughts contained in the *Nocturnes* are too sublimated for some minds, its music can be subjected to strict practical examination, and the workmanship will reveal itself all the more perfect from the test. Though not adhering at all to classic form the *Nocturnes* belong to the category of free symphonies evolved from the modern symphonic poems of Liszt. Thus, though its structure and subdivisions are not according to

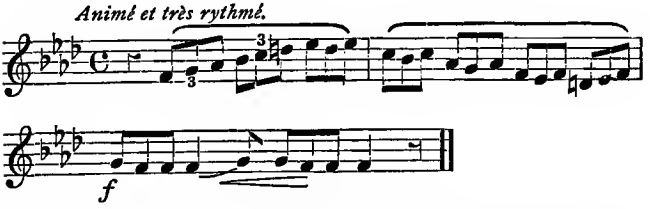
traditional form, it is based on a principle of strict thematic unity which admits of a diversity of variations of the given themes, or, in other words, of an indefinite evolution of the cyclical method. This last-named procedure, originating in a tentative manner with Liszt, was perhaps more fully developed and perfected by César Franck than by any other predecessor of Debussy. It consists in using one or two themes as generators of a composition. The modifications of these are the progenitors of numberless others which in their turn have their development and ramifications while the parent themes are maintained more or less integral through the work. This *cycle musical* is especially noticeable in Debussy's *Quatuor*, in *La Mer*, *L'après-midi d'un faune*, and in the *Nocturnes*, and it can also be traced in certain sections of *Pelléas*. The first movement of the *Nocturnes* contains the embryonic life of the two succeeding movements. It opens with one of Debussy's graceful characteristic curviform themes in B minor; it is played by clarinets and bassoons and is interrupted by the cor anglais, which gives out a special short motif completing and terminating the initial theme. These two motifs are perfectly dissimilar as regards colour and expression. They are originally united, but later they separate and acquire a distinct individuality: the first motif is developed in various ways, but all through its different modifications and changes of tonality the cor anglais motif is heard, either linked or dominating, but unchanging in structure, and like the second subject in Franck's

Trio in F♯ unbroken and indivisible throughout the movement. Towards the end of the *Nuāges* the convoluted first motif merges into a tranquil, suave melody played by a flute and a harp, which forms the second theme of this movement. Underlying this the cor anglais motif is once again heard, also two or three suggestions of the first motif; and then with strings pizzicati and muted brass the tone poem slowly ends. The picture in the mind's eye of the soft, vaporous, fleecy clouds is conveyed by the



first and third subjects, while the cor anglais motif, steadfast and invariable, can be taken to depict the unchanging background of clear sky over which the cloud-rack solemnly drifts. This obvious pictorial effect, exquisitely indicated, has its inner significance to any one who has realised how, even in the play of aerial forces, in their tranquil as well as in their stormy moments, the weakness and strength of earthly hopes and fears, and the clashing of human

wills and passions, can be mirrored and revealed. The second number, "Festivities," is one of exceeding joy and brightness. The opening melody is in triplets, four to the bar. It is first given to the



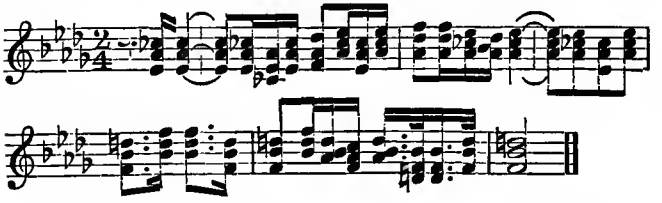
cor anglais and clarinets, and later the flutes and bassoons join in, with syncopating string accompaniment. This is again a modification of the initial theme in *Nuages*, which with its double motif is responsible for the greater part of *Fêtes*, though at the same time this second movement possesses a distinct symmetrical form and existence of its own. The rhythm is strongly accentuated, and carries with it a feeling of powerful, energetic vitality. The movement pulsates throughout with life and buoyancy. The thought of the univeral vibratory forces was unmistakenly present in Debussy's mind when he composed this pæan of optimistic joy :

> The asteroidal fire that dances
> Nightly in the northern blue,
> The brightest of the boreal lances
> Dances not so light as . . . *

this maze of delicate, iridescent harmonies. A sudden pianissimo falls on the quivering, oscillating

* Seosamh Campbell.

triplets, and to a moderated but always extremely rhythmic $\frac{2}{4}$ time harp, cymbals, and muted strings give out a preliminary solemn processional march accompaniment. Then a distant sound of three muted trumpets introduces a ceremonious martial theme derived from the first cor anglais motif; this pompous theme is amplified and strengthened, and resolves itself into a multi-coloured, fantastic, motley procession, which advances, threading its way across the ethereal festival of the elements. It



increases continually in sonority, and when at its apogee a glorious revelry of sound is heard. The preceding movement of "Clouds" and all that has succeeded it in "Festivities" is consummated in this climax of polyphonic music. The whole orchestra takes part in this culminating-point of the composition, and finally combined flutes, oboes, clarinets, and trumpets proclaim the reappearance of the grandiloquent march, and with the exit of the revellers the quivering, mobile, initial subject is resumed. At the conclusion the instruments are muted, and with the lightness of motes gyrating in a sun-ray this aerial movement ends.

Sirens.—A rhythmic undulation is heard on the muted cellos, altos, and contrabasses, while short triplicated arpeggios are played by flutes and clarinets; then sopranos and contraltos sing in an undertone a broken, fragmentary melody derived from the two motifs of the first theme of *Nuages.* At the eighth bar an entirely new subject is introduced on the strings. It is also of an oscillating nature, and its existence was slightly foreshadowed in *Fêtes.* The scoring of this last, as also that of the first and second movements, is at first sight a tangle of germinating motifs. From a few simple themes Debussy evolves a series of subjects; in their turn they engender others, the whole resembling the ramifications of spreading bough and leafy sprays. In some instances he grafts one motif on to another, and from their combination springs an amplified third motif which calls into being one even more individual than itself. The workmanship is of filigree delicacy and finish: the frequent recurrence of the ternary arabesque, which is a favourite device of the composer, gives the printed score a likeness to the art of the goldsmith. What at first sight seems complex and redundant resolves itself after close study into a clear, compendious example of the cyclical principle by a master of theoretical art.

Coming after the radiant *Fêtes,* with its allegorical dramatic procession of life, the third number (*Sirènes*) seems by contrast woven of neutral tints and half-lights. The rocking, wavelike rhythm, the

reminiscent themes recurring in broken snatches like gleams on the more uniform structure of the surging string accompaniment, the sad undertone of the siren voices, give a pictorial effect to this movement which approximates it to one of Whistler's silver and blue toned nocturnes.

In 1904 Debussy published two dances for piano or chromatic harp, with accompaniment of string orchestra. No. 1 is named *Danse Sacrée:* No. 2 *Danse Profane.* The following year an important orchestral work entitled *La Mer: trois esquisses symphoniques,* was published. In this work the composer places his hearers again face to face with one of Nature's great elemental forces ; in it he tells, through the medium of the instruments, a little of the irresistible attraction exercised upon him by the sea.

The first number, *De l'aube à midi sur la mer,* opens pianissimo $\frac{6}{4}$ in B minor. The long-sustained note (B) on the double-basses is used quiveringly on the kettle-drums ; muted violins and altos, also harps, give out a series of steadfast ascending chords, and at the sixth bar a short crisp theme on the oboe reminds one at this juncture and throughout the movement of the cor anglais motif in the *Nocturnes.* From shore to horizon all is still, expectant, mysterious. Then to the violins and cellos is given a distinctive diatonic melody ($\frac{6}{8}$), which is reiterated for twelve bars and gives the impression of glints of light on the peaceful ocean. After a while the entire orchestra is active and in

movement: a new day is breaking, the whole vast panorama of sea and sky is suffused with a golden splendour; delicate tints of rose-pink, pale saffron, and tender green vanish one by one. The solo violin executes a fragment of delicious melody, sixteen cellos divided into four groups give a modification of the first theme. There is a continual increasing of life and animation, and to the cor anglais and 'cello in unison are allotted ten bars of beautiful melody, to the accompaniment of long-sustained chords by the rest of the strings and wood. The movement ends with an emphatic repetition of part of the diatonic theme already described.

II. *Jeux de vagues. Allegro dans un rythme très souple.* E major.—After several anticipatory introductory bars the chief theme is given out ($\frac{3}{4}$) by the first and second violins in octaves, soon followed by a short second theme given to the horns. The play and interplay of the various instruments is most interesting. One seems to see the action of the tiny waves, their crests crinkled into foam by the wind and pierced by sunrays; and here and there amid its larger brethren a wavelet comes dancing along. The whole is a perfect picture of ocean life on a summer's day.

III. *Dialogue du vent et de la mer. Animé et tumultueux.*—This opens with a questioning group of reiterating triplets played by 'cellos and double-basses, later by the altos and answered by oboes and clarinets, giving a variation of the first theme in the first movement. At bar 31 of score a new subject is

played forte by muted trumpets, which is heard again later on ; but previous to this we come across a modified form of the first theme played by horns. This is again taken up by oboe and cor anglais. The movement now develops into a veritable dialogue between strings and wind intruments. In bar 98 recurs the above-mentioned trumpet theme in a slightly modified form: it is one of the finest examples of Debussy's use of the whole-tone scale in polyphonic harmony. He continues to employ it during several succeeding measures. Bar 133 gives a change of key to D flat with a short motif played by horns, which, however, is not heard again. Long-sustained harmonics on first violins with arpeggios on two chromatic harps form the accompaniment for flutes and oboes which reintroduce the first theme with chromatic variations. The sudden change to key of C major, and sixteen bars later the return of that of D flat reveal nothing fresh beyond the development of the first theme. The concluding portion of this movement is a delicate idyll representing the dalliance and coquetting of wind and wave, in which each half of the orchestra has its apportioned declamatory expression.

In the *String Quartet*, written after the *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune*, the cyclic treatment of themes is as remarkable as in the subsequent *Nocturnes*. The opening bars contain the fundamental subject of the quartet. In the first movement in 4 time, this motif, expanded and developed, is associated with a second theme, and the two hence-

forward continue their metamorphosis linked and interwoven. In the Scherzo the viola voices the first theme in a different rhythm ($\frac{6}{8}$). It is taken up in succession by the other instruments. The first violin plays it in lengthened cadence, and later it is employed in pizzicato form. In the third movement, *Andantino doucement expressif*, an amplification of the first theme reversed is given out by the first violin in the fifth bar; afterwards the viola plays it in the second section in a modified form. In the fourth movement (*très modéré*) the initial motif is used in a fragmentary manner. Later this subject takes the form of a fugue, and is given out by the 'cello, answered by the viola, and taken up by the first and second violins. The movement ends with a modified recapitulation of the fundamental theme and works up to the climax, ending with a long scale of G played on the first violin. Though in treatment a great deal of the old classic form is adhered to in this Quartet, yet it is broad and uncircumscribed, and conveys a feeling of enchantment such as is suggested by Keats' distant haunted meres and faery seas forlorn.

The interweaving of human passions with the play of Nature's mighty forces has a constant fascination for Debussy, and he has been for some time engaged in writing incidental music for *King Lear*. He has also in preparation a setting of D. G. Rossetti's strange mystic sonnets "Willowwood," and it is announced that M. Albert Carré will shortly produce another work at the Opéra

Comique from the pen of the composer of *Pelléas* which is a series of episodes from the "Story of Tristan." The treatment of this romantic old-world legend will be on totally dissimilar lines from those of the Wagnerian drama.

CHAPTER IV

SONGS AND PIANO PIECES

Mystiques barcarolles
. . . .
Musique qui pénètre.—VERLAINE

TOGETHER with such song-writers as Duparc, Chausson, Fauré, Jemain, Strauss, and Max Reger, Debussy is a past master of his craft. One can be mindful of his discriminating choice of poems—and selection needs discretion, for there are forbidden degrees in the alliance of music and poetry—but a strict investigation of the exact art with which he fashions these dainty creations of his brain is as impracticable as endeavouring to analyse the essence of a morning dewdrop or the fragrance of a night-scented flower. Certain outward signs of the workmanship of his songs can be noted, but "the secret of the grace beyond the reach of art" eludes our pursuit. It appears as if, having grasped the general purport and trend of a poem, he recorded his impression in music with a series of gleams and sudden lights, which partial impressions are derived from the main theme or thought. It is in his songs that the parallel between his art and M. Henri le

Sidaner's exquisite colour impressions is most clearly perceptible. In one of his recent series of paintings, named by him "Venise: Lueurs et Lumières," Le Sidaner takes as his subject a few of the old monumental palaces and buildings in Venice; also one of her smaller canals, and a concert on one of her wide watery highways. He surrounds these with the poetry of the different times and seasons in which he surveys them. And to their own intrinsic charm he adds the specific quality of light appertaining to Autumn, Winter, Dawn, Gloaming, Eventide and Night. They one and all possess, not only their special atmospheric luminosity, but each of them is a record of Nature mirrored in the mind of an exceptionally gifted artist and made ostensible against a background of ordinary general interest. In Debussy's *Ariettes oubliées*, Verlaine's second Aquarelle, *Spleen* is a delineation of the poet's mood reflected on the sensitive plate of the composer's mind and appropriated to a similar mood of his own. The satiated desire anticipating and fearing the inevitable change is rendered objectively perceptible in the poet's overstrained perception of the excess of summer beauty in crimson roses, cloudless skies, translucent green sea. The hot midday rays of the sun accentuate the gloss on the holly leaves, glint the glimmering brightness of the box trees, and suffuse the lengthening landscape with glowing heat. The song begins with a short melodic cadence as prelude; it is used as an undertone throughout.

The words "Les roses étaient toutes rouges, et les lierres étaient tout noirs" are declaimed. Then to the harmonised accompaniment of the opening prelude and its development is heard in poignant descending cadence: "Chère, pour peu que tu te bouges, Renaissent tous mes désespoirs." Similar accents, harmonised in the accompaniment, voice the poet's despondent mood. For the mainspring of the poem is anxiety and anticipation, which corrode the happy present.

> Je crains toujours, ce qu'est d'attendre
> Quelque fuite atroce de vous.

The last words are underlined by a series of ascending, restless demi-semiquavers. Then later a group of ascending chords leads to the climax and descends to the anticlimax:

> Je suis las,
> Et de la campagne infinie
> Et de tout, fors de vous, Hélas!

Hélas! is sung at the end of the recurrence of the little plaintive initial prelude. The song concludes with some soft long-drawn chords in F minor. This slight musical analysis, which is merely an attempt at delineating a musical impression in pen and ink, is given to show how minute is Debussy's elaboration of detail in even a short song of thirty-four bars And this perfect little piece of workmanship is characterised by apparent simplicity and delightful spontaneity of thought and treatment.

Verlaine's poems have furnished many a com-

poser with subject-matter for songs. Among French musicians Gabriel Fauré has perhaps set the greatest number; both Fauré and Ernest Chausson have captured the soulful qualities of these lyrics; the dainty decorative aspect and light descriptive touches of many of them have appealed most to Charpentier, De Severac and to Doret. Debussy has found his own moods and feelings mirrored in Verlaine's verse, and his songs are not so much conceptions of the poems as reflections of the poet's immaterial impressions.

The airy delicacy of the third *Ariette oubliée* in both words and music could not easily be surpassed. Just a glimpse is given of the shadowy waters of a river: in their depths the trembling reflection of the adjacent trees, while overhead in their branches the soft plaint of doves is heard. An analogy is hazarded between this *coup-d'œil* of the dim landscape and the human soul lamenting, like doves amid high foliage, sunken hopes and lost ideals. The little song is as delicate as a spring windflower: insubstantial as the smoke to which Verlaine likens the waving tree reflections, the breath of superfluous words almost injures its aerial beauty. In the same volume of songs "Chevaux de Bois" is included; also "Green" and the two first numbers of "Ariettes oubliées." In the three last, words and music are again in intimate communion. The accompaniment to "Il pleure dans mon cœur" lends a feeling of continuity and monotony to the murmur of the rain falling upon earth and roofs

and dulling the poet's sad heart. "Chevaux de Bois," descriptive of a circus merry-go-round in a sordid part of Paris, is in vivid contrast to the other songs. It is full of life and movement. resembling one of Manet's animated canvases. Round and round, a hundred times, a thousand times, revolve the gaily painted horses to the sound of the clanging steam-made music. On them sit the child in red and the mother in white, the boy in black and the girl in pink, each with their Sunday penny. And in the midst of the rabble and rush, in and out of the hurly-burly, walks the poet, hungry and tired and dizzy. The setting is an evocation of the picture and of the writer's mood when visualising it. Rapid in execution, the song leaves a vertiginous effect behind it. Verlaine's "En Sourdine" and "Colloque Sentimental" are amongst the best instances of Debussy's delicate handling of fugitive evanescent dream-lyrics. The first is a crystallisation of a perfect moment of life; the second, a suscitation of the spectres of past emotions. A feeling of close intimity and fruition is given to the one, while to the other one of eeriness and loss is apportioned by the sympathetic composer.

Fantoches is a jest; its humour and finesse are reciprocated with skilful, dainty touch. *Clair de lune* gives the composer opportunity for effective nature transposition. The fabric of the music is light and graceful in outline; the delicate arabesques in the accompaniment suggest the play of shifting, changeful moonrays; and over the whole composi-

tion a feeling of stillness and tranquillity is suffused. The three *Chansons de Bilitis* are taken from Pierre Louys' volume of poems bearing that name. Bilitis is supposed by her creator to have been a contemporary of Sappho. He tells that she was born in the mountains west of Pamphylia. Amidst wild scenery, where great lakes are cradled in the heights, and the valleys are still and silent, Bilitis wrote of the nymphs whom she cherished and of the fountains round which they congregated. Later she told of her deep love, and when sorrow came to her she ceased to sing. Debussy has set *La Flûte de Pan, La Chevelure* and *Le Tombeau des Naïades.* In the first, the Lydian scale is used as prelude and introduced into the accompaniment with singular effect. It gives a reedy, sylvan sound to the pastoral theme. In the accompaniment to *La Chevelure* the same Lydian scale (5th Gregorian mode) is employed. By the simplest possible means, for the melody is of almost psalmodic declamation, a wealth of impassioned sentiment is concentrated into a few phrases. The subject is a vivid dream, related by Bilitis, in which a moment of ardent love is relived in memory. The relaxation of tension after the climax is particularly striking, and combined with the grave simplicity of the prelude and opening bars places the strong emotion displayed midway in the composition in salient relief. The white, wintry picture of *Le Tombeau des Naïades* is realistically reproduced. The clear-cut tonalities of the accompaniment with its reiterated shuddering groups of

ascending semi-quavers, the sustained uniformity of the clear utterance, the acciaccatura in front of the chords, all combine to produce an effect of chill and cold and the uniformity of a snow-swept landscape. After the archaic style of these songs Baudelaire's "Cinq Poèmes" seem showy in comparison. But it is in his diversified treatment of contrasting themes that Debussy's genius is so clearly shown. Baudelaire's exotic imagery has been allied to some of the most exuberant and richly coloured melody of all Debussy's songs. In chronological order they were published five years before the *Chansons de Bilitis* and also before some of the *Ariettes oubliées.* In each of them the accompaniments are more amplified than in any of the other songs. A greater redundancy is given to harmonic effects and to the treatment of the different themes. They are rhapsodical and ornamental in design. The strange union of sensuousness and spirituality, of Eastern ardour and delicate sensibility in the poems, is mirrored in the exquisite melodic phrases and passionate accents of these songs. In *La Mort des Amants* and *Le Balcon* the supple, expressive themes unite themselves with perfect grace to the diversified emotional and lyrical movements of the poet's thoughts, while in *Recueillement* and *Harmonie du Soir* a more placid soul state is mirrored.* In Debussy's own *Proses Lyriques,* especially in *De Rêve* and *De Fleurs,* the influence of Baudelaire may be felt. *De Soir*

* "Le Jet d'Eau," (Baudelaire) has lately been scored for orchestra by the composer.

is a little idyll recording the joys of Sunday migrations into the country. Then "sad, unavailing thoughts come to him and cause him to lament the Sundays of yester-year." The little prose-poem ends by telling how velvet-footed night comes to lull the weary sky to slumber and "'tis Sunday in the avenues of stars, where the gold and silver Virgin scatters earthwards the dream flowers of oblivion. *Vite, les petits anges, dépassez les hirondelles afin de vous coucher forts d'absolution. Prenez pitié des villes, prenez pitié des cœurs, vous, la Vierge or sur argent.*" The quaint and simple music is admirably adapted to this pretty fancy with its archaic, decorative ending. From among other skilful settings of poems by Bourget, Tristan L'hermite, Théodore de Banville and others, mention must be made of the two *Rondels* by Charles duc d'Orléans. The stately refinement, stiff grace and gentle pathos of these have been refashioned in the appropriate music.

It is certain that the right rendering of these beautiful songs is no very easy matter. They bristle with the kind of difficulties which the ordinary average singer seldom cares to surmount. For the awkward intervals and intricate progressions an extremely accurate ear is required. In each case the poet has to be considered equally with the musician. For this, intelligence and a poetic insight are needed; also artistic taste, refinement, and the power of conveying the lighter and subtler shades of emotion and sentiment. Hard work and earnest study

will, however, be amply rewarded, and no real musician can fail to apprehend the rare beauty contained in the varied collection of Debussy's masterpieces of vocal art.

Many of the piano pieces are almost equally interesting. *Hommage à Rameau*, in the style of the sarabandes of the old Masters, is a graceful *tour de force*. *Reflets dans l'eau* and *Jardins sous la Pluie* are both impressionist sketches. The first is a delicate reproduction in harmonic sound of shimmering waters and of the shifting, dazzling reflections seen in their depths. The rippling flow and trickle of running stream or brooklet is heard, the cool, translucent effect and gurgle of disturbed water is given, and throughout the piece the constant mobility of the trembling, wavering shadows is maintained. *Jardins sous la Pluie* depicts the monotonous dripping of a summer shower through thick leafy trees, the gradual dispersal of clouds and the first flicker, after the shower, of sunbeams falling on the refreshed and radiant flowers. *Mouvements* is a pæan of joyful life and action. Many of Debussy's characteristic harmonies and whole-tone scales occur in these different studies. In *Pagodes* his free, fantastic use of unrelated chords and hitherto unlicensed intervals will be found in plenty. It is full of Eastern colouring ending in a soft, vibrating, dissonant chord which is in keeping with the bizarre Chinese picture. In *Une Soirée en Grenade* (mouvement de Habanera) the quick transpositions of key and rhythm and abrupt changes of mood and feeling portray the varying

southern nature with its alternations of ardour and extreme languor. Among the earlier compositions for the piano are *Deux Arabesques:* both are melodious, and the first, though in no way anticipating Debussy's later style, is extremely graceful and pleasing. The second set of *Images: Gigue triste, Ibéria* and *Ronde,* have been successfully scored by the composer for orchestra. *Masques, L'Isle Joyeuse, Suite Bergamesque,* and *Pour le Piano* are all well known and often heard on concert platforms. Something of the fluidity of the *Pelléas* fountain music and of the "deep music of ancient forests" has crept into the first number of *Pour le Piano,* entitled *Prélude,* and classic grace and eloquence permeate the old-world *Sarabande.* In all these sonorous impressions, the mind of a true poet and the hand of a subtle harmonist can be traced. There is no straining for effect, no affected posing; all is the outcome of an independent genius objectively projecting his ideas in new and original harmonies.

CHAPTER V

"PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE"

> "Le théâtre doit être le reflet de la vie, non de cette vie exterieure de parade, mais de la vraie vie intérieure toute de reflexion."—MAETERLINCK.

SOONER or later, at some epoch of their lives, most composers of note turn to opera as a means of expressing themselves. It is for them at one and the same time a growth, a development, a widening of scope, a focussing of scattered energies. The gradual and consistent evolution of Debussy's art fulfilled itself in the writing of the lyric drama *Pelléas et Mélisande.* This opera falls into place in his career as the logical outcome of all that preceded it. The psychology displayed in the song miniatures, the iridescent colouring of the *Après Midi d'un Faune* and the *Nocturnes;* the cyclical devices of the *Quatuor* and the varied fugitive hues and shades of the piano pieces are all gathered up and converged into the larger and more elaborate work. This selection of Maeterlinck's play as subject-matter is also co-ordinate with his previous associations of poetry and music. The Belgian writer's drama was particularly fitted for the exercise of Debussy's

mystic turn of mind and fanciful play of thought, and it lent itself readily to the amplification it received from his musical setting. Spontaneous, original, full of thought and symbolism, it is as fragrant as the flowers in the gardens of the old castle in Allemonde, and as fresh as the sea which beats round King Arkël's domain. It belongs to the series destined by its author for a theatre of Marionettes. The explanation given by him of his reasons for choosing this appellation are sufficiently interesting to be briefly quoted: unintentionally they demonstrate how puissant an aid music can be to these suggestive scenic poems. Maeterlinck shares with many others the feeling of disillusion when the curtain lifts on a favourite poetic play. "The theatre," he says, "kills the majority of chefs d'œuvre. . . . Every chef d'œuvre is a symbol, and a symbol does not tolerate the active co-operation of human beings. . . . The Greeks were aware of this antinomy, and the masks used by them, which have no meaning to us, probably served to extenuate the appearance of human beings and to assuage the symbol." It is for these same reasons that he places the actors behind a veil of transparent gauze, uses the style of utterance of simple primitive folk, and assigns his dramas "to beings by nature not unfriendly to poetry," who, for want of a better name, he designates as "Marionettes." * In Debussy's lyrical drama of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the music aids

* French preface to second series of Maeterlinck's plays, translated by Richard Hovey.

the dramatist's theories by accentuating the illusion and emphasising the poetic content; it voices in its own mysterious language the hidden beauty of symbol, and reveals the secret hopes and fears lurking in the hearts of the characters.

In outline the story runs thus: There was once an old king of Allemonde named Arkël. In his grim castle, situated on a wild rocky coast and partly surrounded by dense forests, there lived with him his daughter Genevieve, her second husband and her son Pelléas; also her son by a former husband, Golaud, and his little son Yniold. Golaud's wife had died, and his grandfather, for political reasons, had arranged a marriage for him with a princess of an adjoining country named Ursula. One day Golaud, who was a mighty hunter, left the castle where his stepfather lay dangerously ill, and started off on a boarhunting expedition. He loses his way in a forest, and emerging from the thick trees and undergrowth on to an open space, he sees a beautiful maiden, dressed like a princess, sitting by the side of a pool and weeping. She is very timid and frightened and begs him not to touch her. She tells him she comes from a far distant land; that she has run away and that a crown some one had given her has fallen into the water. She forbids him to seek for it, and warns him if he does she will throw herself into the pool. Finally, though she thinks him old and rough and grey-haired, he persuades her to come away with him. Six months later Pelléas

Photo. Berger, Paris

MISS MARY GARDEN AS MÉLISANDE

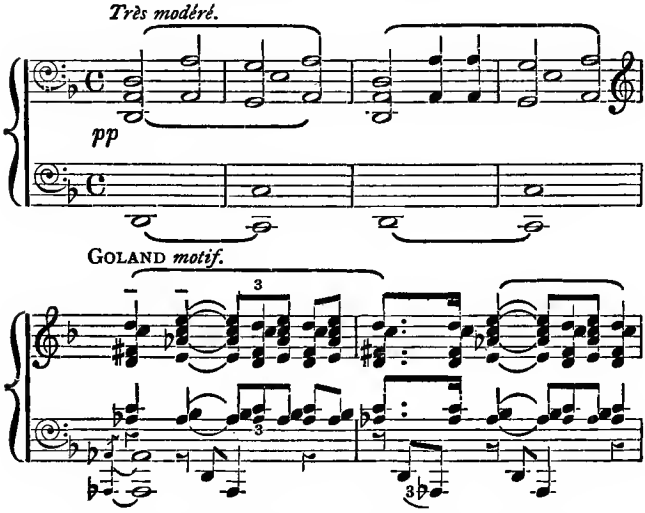
receives a letter from Golaud telling him of his marriage with the little unknown Mélisande, and of her beauty, and begging him, ere he returns home to intercede on his behalf with his grandfather. Pelléas gives the letter to his mother, and she breaks the news to the old king, who wisely accepts the inevitable. Golaud brings Mélisande home to the solitary gloomy castle where, in his absence on hunting expeditions, she wiles away her time playing with her little stepson, and discovering the old-time meanings of affinity and love. With gay insouciance Pelléas and Mélisande are ever roaming together in the sunniest parts of Arkël's ancient domain. But the green flame of jealousy in Golaud's eyes dispels their golden dreams, and slowly and relentlessly the gyves of Fate wind round them. One beautiful moonlight night the morose and angry husband surprises the lovers by an old well celebrated for its curative powers of blindness; he menaces Mélisande and stabs Pelléas to death. That night to the stunned and frightened Mélisande a child is born, and her life is in dire peril. While it is trembling in the balance, Golaud, maddened by the desire of ascertaining if her love was innocent or guilty, plies the dying girl with brutal questions; the agitation is too severe for the weakened system: Mélisande loses her frail hold on life and dies. This simple story, fraught with pathos and passion, portrayed by Maeterlinck with his usual insight and sympathetic touch, has gained a still greater elusive beauty and a deeper significance by its

association with the music so aptly adapted by Debussy to its needs. His setting of the story is on no preconceived lines: it has no relation to any opera that has preceded it. The whole drama is sung by the characters to a kind of psalmodic declamation. This *sprach-melodie* might be called intensified speech occasionally resembling plain or Gregorian chant. It is sung in measured cadences; its free accent forms the melody, and it is always perfectly balanced and symmetrical. The delicate orchestration is well adapted to the needs of this declamatory style of utterance. Sometimes the dialogue is merely accompanied by a few sparse richly-coloured chords; at other times it is sustained by an aggregation of beautiful chord sequences; unusual combinations are continually scintillating among these, and the ancient modes devoid of leading note intensify the old-world feeling of the legendary drama. At intervals the orchestra voices the inner soul-states of the characters, depicting also the sympathy between these and the sentient soul of Nature and amplifying the objective moods of each. The dialogue is never lost in the orchestration; it is always independent, clear and vocal. There is no labelling of objects, places, emotions and personages, as in Wagner's music-dramas, but there are a certain number of suggestive themes treated cyclically and always in close relationship to what has preceded or succeeded them. Debussy is strongly averse to the intimate coalescence of voice and orchestra. The following words, written by him in

the *Revue Blanche* of 1901, express his opinions on the subject: "Wagner has left us an inheritance of certain formulas for the union of music and drama, the inefficiency of which will some day be recognised. It is admissible that for his own particular reasons he should have invented the leit-motif itinerary for the use of those who cannot find their way in a score, and by so doing he expedited matters for himself. What is of more serious import is the fact that he has accustomed us to making music servilely responsible for the protagonists. . . . Music possesses rhythm, and this inner power directs its development; the movements of the soul have also a rhythm: it is more instinctively comprehensive, and it is subordinated to a multitude of different circumstances and events. From the juxtaposition of these two different rhythms a continual conflict ensues. The twain do not amalgamate; either the music gets out of breath running after the protagonists, or the protagonist has to hold on to a note in order to allow the music to overtake him. There have been miraculous conjunctions of the two forces, and to Wagner the meed of praise is owing for having brought about some of these encounters; but these fortuitous occurrences have been due to chance which more often than not shows itself unaccommodating or deceiving. Thus once and for all it may be said that the application of the symphonic form to dramatic action, instead of helping it, as was triumphantly asserted in the days when

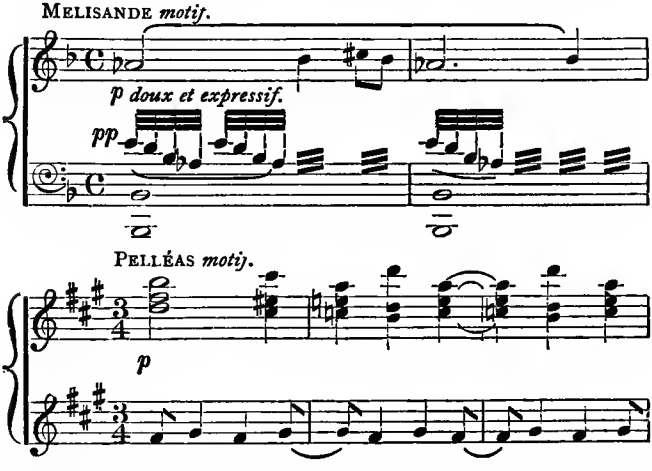
Wagner reigned over lyric drama, is liable to injure it."

In *Pelléas* its composer's theories are seen in practice. The result is one of complete freedom for the characters of the drama. They are surrounded by the music, upheld by it, but never merged in it or obscured. This lyric drama is a



true instance of unity in variety, and from the first bar to the last the greatest effects seem to be brought about by the least possible means. The soft grave opening theme appertaining to the first Gregorian mode (scale of D without leading note) suggests at once the remote legendary atmosphere in which the play is cast. There is also a semblance of Fate in its solemn steady rhythm. It is succeeded

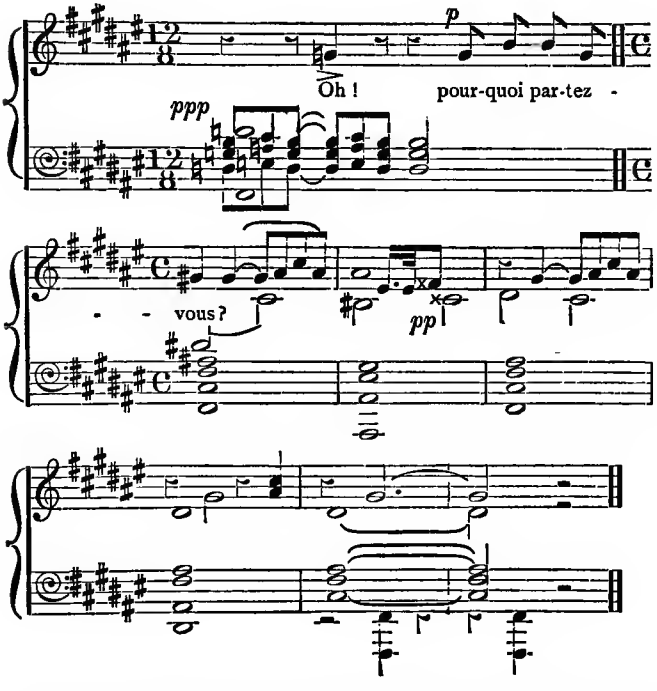
by the Golaud motif and by a brief melody sustained by broken arpeggios symbolising Mélisande, but as the branches of the forest trees are thrust aside by Golaud he makes his entrance to the pensive, tristful initial chords. Mélisande's characteristic theme resembles the commencement of a folksong; for Pelléas five notes surrounding a diminished chord of the fifth are used. All these motifs are generating



themes of the opera; they undergo infinite modifications during the course of the work. In Scene II., when Genevieve reads Golaud's letter to Pelléas relating the marriage of the former with Mélisande, and when, later, Pelléas enters and acquaints his mother and grandfather with the contents of the letter he has received from his friend Marcellus entreating his presence by his bedside, the rules of

plain chant are requisitioned and adapted. The first part of psalmody, the intonation, is not used, but the second and third forms, a reciting note (dominant), and cadences, either medial or final, are employed to punctuate the phrases. The long-sustained accompanying chords founded on the Diatonic scale are tranquil and simple in texture, in no way hampering the freedom of the rhythm. The whole scene is of premonitory gravity. The soft plaint of Mélisande's motif interwoven with Arkël's speech accentuates the note of warning. Afterwards, in the castle gardens, enclosed by the forest and the sea, Mélisande is told by Genevieve to turn her eyes from the dark woods and look towards the light on the sea; then from the shore Pelléas comes at Genevieve's call. The three together watch the vessel which had brought Golaud and Mélisande leaving the neighbouring port. A mist falls on the water, and the revolving beacon flame of the lighthouse seen on the coast is mirrored in the music, also signs of a coming storm. Genevieve, foreseeing the approach of night, goes to minister to the wants of the little Yniold, and Pelléas and Mélisande are left alone watching the lights kindling on the coast. When the wind freshens Pelléas suggests going indoors and offers to guide Mélisande home. Her hands are full of flowers, and the road is steep and dark, so he holds her arm, and tells her that perhaps on the morrow he will be leaving the castle. "Oh! why do you go away?" she replies, with an acute accent on the last note. This, her first unwitting heartache, is depicted

in sighing cadence by the orchestra. This theme is introduced in different parts of the drama, and its pathetic utterance is often heard in the last sad death scene.



Subtle as he is in his portrayal of the workings of the human heart and soul, Debussy is equally wonderful in his Nature touches. The instability and insecurity of water, its dank stagnancy in underground caves, its clear bubbling depths in living fountain, spring or mere; or again, the cool

shifting effect of moonlight, the palpitating atmosphere of midday, the dark gravity of ancient thickset forests, the wide free expanse of ocean and sea : all these are visualised in sound and are woven symbolically around the different temperaments and personalities of those who live amid these environments. For sunny gladness and light-heartedness the first scene of Act II. is not easily surpassed. The curtain lifts on a secluded portion of the castle grounds in which is situated an old abandoned miraculous spring. The wandering steps of Pelléas and Mélisande have led them thither. The place is suffused with sunlight, and the cool spot is welcome after the heat of the gardens. The stillness around the old well is very marked. In the silence Pelléas thinks he hears the water sleeping. Mélisande leans over the edge of the marble basin : she wants to see the bottom of the well. She is feverishly happy. Pelléas questions her about her meeting, also by the side of a well, with Golaud, but she parries his questions and, contrary to his entreaties, takes her wedding ring and plays at throwing it up in the glinting light on the water and catching it as it descends. Higher and higher she throws it, and finally, after one fateful leap upwards, as midday sounds on the castle bell, the golden circlet eludes her grasp and falls into the deep well. There is a faint suggestion of the Golaud motif which has been underlying some of the previous cadences, and as the girl gets more and more frightened and agitated, this sinister theme is still more strongly accentuated.

At the outset, in this scene, in which the music seems woven of sunbeams and running water, Pelléas' theme, originally sounded on five flutes, is heard slightly modified on two flutes, as if suggesting the sympathy of Nature with the lovers. In the interlude which follows, Golaud's motif is worked up and interwoven with the Mélisande theme, and continues restless and intermittent until the curtain rises on Golaud's apartment in the castle some hours later, where he lies ill in bed from a wound caused by a fall from his horse at midday on the same day. In this scene, where Mélisande watches by her husband's side, her preoccupation and her distress are first notified by the modulated short theme referred to in the garden scene, suggesting her then sudden and now hidden love for Pelléas. When Golaud's suspicions are aroused he questions her: Can she not accustom herself to the life at the castle?—in monotonous, reiterated descending crotchets on an ascending consecutive scale of A minor this dull existence is depicted by the voice and orchestra. "Yes, yes, it is true one never sees the sky here," she sings, and then, to a reminiscence of the fluid fountain music, she says, "I saw it for the first time this morning." When Golaud misses her ring she fears to tell him the truth. Then follows the subtle scene in the grottoes by the sea, where the lovers are forced to act the living lie. Afterwards the beautiful balcony scene, where the melodic declamation reaches almost lyrical expression, followed by the short rapid epic

of hate, when Golaud leads Pelléas down to the castle vaults under pretence of showing him the stagnant water lying within. The feeling of suffocation, of intense darkness is reproduced in the heavy sombre music, also the black night of jealousy in the heart of Golaud and the nervous terror in that of Pelléas. They turn and mount the stairs in silence, and the curtain falls, presently to lift and disclose the terrace at the entrance to the subterranean passages. The short *entr'acte* portrays their ascent from the foul underground air to the clear atmosphere of garden and woodland. Delicate arpeggio passages herald the coming light; the brothers emerge from obscurity, and Pelléas welcomes with delight "all the air of all the sea." He notices the freshness of the newly watered flowers, and drinks in the smell of the grass and the wet roses. It is midday: sounds of bells are heard, and of children running to the beach to bathe. This short scene pulsates with dramatic and orchestral effect. Following the scene in which Golaud insults Mélisande, and strikes her in his rage to the ground, there is the final meeting of the lovers by moonlight at the well in the wood. Pelléas avows his love, and Mélisande whispers a trembling rejoinder. At this crucial moment the silence of the orchestra is most effective; it is broken by two successive chords of the ninth played *pianissimo.* Later the clanging of the bolts and bars of the massive castle doors is heard in the music and the grinding of the heavy chains as all is made secure for the night, and the lovers realise they are

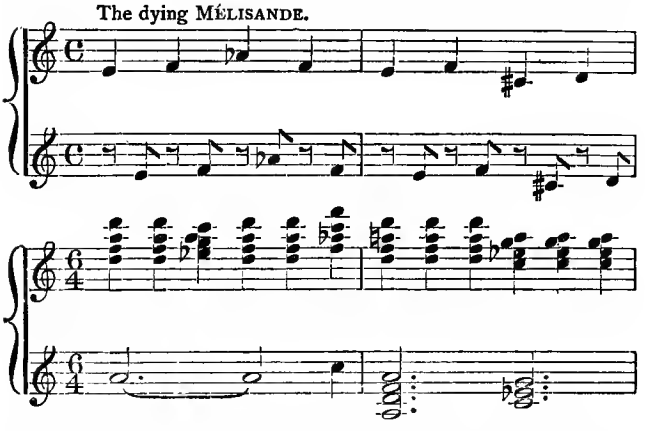
Photo. Nadar, Paris

M. JEAN PÉRIET AS PELLÉAS

locked out. Then a suggestion of the sinister Golaud theme, the sensing of his approach by Mélisande, the close embrace of the lovers, the stab in the dark, Pelléas' death and Mélisande's flight. Finally the touching death scene, with its tangle of reminiscent themes and counter themes. The whole opera is a constant tracery of melodious allusive phrases, and the last act resembles a piece of filigree work in delicacy of design and detail. The orchestral impressions crowd on one another. Golaud's remorse and consequent morose stillness is depicted, also the flicker of life in the dying Mélisande momentarily fortified by the invigorating sea breeze flowing in through the large open window. The tender Mélisande motif flickers and fades and then gains in volume, as the throb of pleasure in the girl's eyes at the sight of the setting sun is voiced in the ascending chords and major and minor triplets. After an interval of joy in returning life she notices Golaud and calls him to her side. Here the solemn, fateful, initial theme of the drama is heard presaging again disaster and woe. Golaud begs to be left alone with his wife. The doctor and Arkël leave the room. Then in the quiet death chamber, all the stronger for being at first held in check, the storm wind of human jealousy and passion rages. "Didst thou love Pelléas?" . . . "Why, yes, I loved him. Where is he?" is the simple answer. And in the girl's mind sweet recollections surge one by one—the last meeting with Pelléas; her first heart-struggle in the shadowy garden by the sea;

her happy hours with him by the fountain in the midday sun, on the balcony by the light of the moon ; the cool depths of the miraculous fountain ; the dream rose seen in the dusky green in the night scene of flowing tresses and clasped hands; all these reminiscent themes and many more are interlinked and reproduced by the orchestra, while all the time Golaud persists in his selfish questioning. The pathetic Mélisande motif becomes *pianissimo* and *doucement expressif:* the harassed girl faints. At that moment Arkël and the doctor re-enter the room. The voice of the kindly old grandfather is always soothing to Mélisande. Arkël is the symbol of wise and loving compassion. He again recalls her to life

The dying MÉLISANDE.



and love; the first love theme accompanies her answer to him and is repeated when the tiny infant is replaced in its cradle. It is heard once again in

one of its numberless modifications when the trembling soul quits the worn-out body. A few bars later the Mélisande theme is played for the last time accompanying Arkël's words referring to her after her death: "It was a little quiet being, so timid and so silent. It was a poor little mysterious being, like all the world."

This lovely music-drama, which recalls itself to the memory as if woven of dreams and many-coloured sounds, cost its composer thirteen years of work. Produced at the Paris Opéra Comique in May 1903, it marks an epoch in the history of operatic music. It is entirely without precedent, bearing no resemblance to any other opera. Some will be captivated at a first hearing; others will be puzzled and perplexed. Its charm is not contained in any usual or hackneyed effects. Its appeal is to the mind and imagination far more than to the emotions and senses; to the lover of rich rare polyphony rather than to him who delights in flowing melody and tuneful phrase. The constant succession of ideas, each more or less complete in itself, is given by the brilliant harmonic progressions, which are eminently satisfying and restful to the ear. Its appearance raised a storm of conflicting criticism. In the five years that have elapsed since its first performance it has gained for itself a select public, the ranks of which are steadily increasing year by year. It has been heard with success in Germany, Belgium and Italy. Together with its "inoubliable Mélisande," as M. Debussy names Miss Mary Garden in his dedication to her of his *Ariettes*

oublieés, it will shortly be performed in New York at the Manhattan Opera House. MM. Jean Périer and Dufranne are also members of the anticipated cast. Before long, it is to be hoped, it will find its way to other important stages, where it will earn the admiration and favour of all who are discriminating and who can appreciate its mystic, poetic, and original qualities.

CHAPTER VI

AS WRITER AND CRITIC

"Truth! there can be no merit, no craft at all, without that."—WALTER PATER.

M. DEBUSSY'S prose writings as critic have a peculiar charm of their own. They are especially interesting inasmuch as they reveal some of the workings of his original mind, and they tell in terse, incisive language his views and opinions, not only on music and musicians, but also, incidentally, on extraneous matters bearing on his art. He uses words with a Frenchman's loving respect and care, and occasionally his prose is poetical in matter and manner. He is accused of having a mordant pen, and there are times when his racy style verges in that direction; but he is seldom acrimonious, and a study of his writings as a whole convinces one of the equity of his judgment and of his unfaltering truth and sincerity. There is always a "vein" of *bonhomie* apparent behind his most caustic remarks, and he possesses a goodly amount of wit and finesse. In the first and second chapters of this book, some of his utterances on his own attitude towards his art have been given. For the purposes of allowing free rein to his fancy he in-

vented a character whom he named M. Croche; through the medium of this lay figure he vented, in an outspoken manner, all that irritated or pleased him during his brief period of excursion into the domain of musical criticism. He held the post of critic on the *Revue Blanche* during the greater part of the years 1901 and 1902, and he contributed in the same capacity to the columns of *Gil Blas* in 1903. In the following paragraphs he introduces his readers to M. Croche :—" It was a lovely evening and I had decided to be idle (in more polite language, we will take for granted that I gave myself up to dreaming). I dreamt : . . . formulated my thoughts ? . . . or should I finish some work? Are not these each and all so many interrogations suggested by an infantile vanity anxious to free itself at all costs from irksome thoughts ; all of which ill conceal the foolish notion of wishing to appear superior to others. And this superiority represents no particular effort if it does not include the desire to rise above oneself. But that is a special alchemic process in which one must give as a holocaust one's own cherished little personality. And this is hard to endure and absolutely barren in result. The evening was still beautiful, but, as may be noticed, I was not in a good humour. I was losing sight of my own identity, and all kinds of tiresome impersonal ideas floated round me. Just then my front door bell rang and I made the acquaintance of M. Croche."

Debussy proceeds to describe his imaginary visitor, whose physiognomy reminds him at one and

the same time of the jockey Tom Lane and M. Thiers. He discusses all manner of things henceforward with this personage : audiences, amateurs, institutions, Prix de Rome, art and artists, Nature : all are touched upon and given some new aspect or fresh turn of thought.

In *Gil Blas* there are some delightful bits of writing on Bach, Beethoven and other classicists, some amusing impressions of Wagner's Tetralogy in London and a few clever pen-pictures of modern musicians. It is difficult to select from among the many passages on Bach ; some are too lengthy and will not bear cutting, but the following is short and concise :—

"From Bach's works a somewhat striking analogy forces itself on the mind : Bach is the Graal and Wagner Klingsor who would destroy the Graal and usurp the homage given to it. Bach exercises a sovereign influence on music, and in his goodness and might he has willed that we should ever gain fresh knowledge from the noble lessons he has left us, and thus his disinterested love is perpetuated. As years roll by Wagner's sombre and disquieting shadow lessens and grows dim."

À propos of Beethoven's ninth Symphony he says : "There is nothing superfluous in this monumental work ; not even the andante, which some modern æsthetes have deemed too long. Is it not a rest thoughtfully foreseen between the persistent rhythm of the Scherzo and the instrumental torrent leading irresistibly to the glory of

the finale ? . . . The overflowing humanity, which poured across the traditional limits of the symphony, issued from the soul inebriated with the desire for freedom. By irony of circumstances this soul was beating, a prisoner, against the golden bars erected by the mistaken charity of the great and powerful. With his heart brimful of pain Beethoven ardently desired communion with all men. Actuated by this longing, he directed the manifold expression of his genius to reach the humblest and poorest of his 'brethren.' Has he been heard by them ? The question remains problematic."

Our English literature is familiar to Debussy, and Shakespeare is one of his favourite poets. He had occasion to criticise G. Huë's "Titania" at the Opéra Comique in 1903. A series of foggy days had caused him to think of London, and, as he says, "the association of ideas did not demand a great mental effort. And the name of Titania," he continues, "of necessity recalls that of Shakespeare and of his fascinating *Midsummer Night's Dream* of which the true and most poetical title would be a Dream of St. John's Night : the shortest night of the year. Glowing night, luminous with myriad stars, brief enchanted night, spanned by a twilight unwilling to die and a dawn impatient of birth. Dream night, whose life is the length of a dream." Then his thoughts travel to Weber and to his "Oberon." He evokes a vision of this composer wandering in the London streets, but his remarks

on Weber's art work have been given in an earlier chapter.

In June 1903 Debussy came to London to write his impressions of Wagner's Tetralogy for *Gil Blas.*

"It is difficult," he says, "for any one who has not had the same experience to picture to themselves the condition of a man's mind, even the most normal, after attending the Tetralogy for four consecutive evenings. A quadrille of leit-motifs dances in one's brain, in which Siegfried's theme and Wotan's lance, are *vis-à-vis,* while the malediction motif cuts some weird figures. It is more than an obsession, it is a complete possession. One loses one's identity, and becomes transformed into a walking leit-motif moving in a tetralogical atmosphere. It seems as if for the future our habitual code of civility will not prevent us from hailing our friends with Valkyrie exclamations! Hoyo-toho! Hei aha! Hoyohei! How gay it all is! Hoyohei . . . ah! milord! how insufferable these people in helmets and wild-beast skins become by the time the fourth evening comes round. Remember that at each and every appearance they are accompanied by their d——d leit-motif. There are some who even sing it themselves. It is as if a harmless lunatic were to present you with his visiting card while he declaimed lyrically what was inscribed thereon." Some lengthy remarks follow on the different dramatic effects, and Debussy ends by saying: "All this is really dramatic criticism, which is outside my province, and I prefer to describe the impassioned

beauties in the Tetralogy. There are long moments of ennui when one does not really know which is most at fault: the music or the drama? Then suddenly the most supremely lovely music, irresistible as the sea, surges into one's ears and criticism flies to the winds. Sometimes this is only of a minute's duration, at other times of greater length. . . . In conclusion I would affirm that one cannot criticise such a momentous work. It is a monument, the architectural lines of which stretch far into infinity."

To the work of his contemporaries M. Debussy is ever ready to accord cordial and unstinted admiration when he feels he can conscientiously do so. He speaks of *L'Etranger* as "le pur drame musical de Vincent d'Indy marquant à ce qu'il me semble une ère nouvelle dans l'art si probe de ce compositeur." And in *Gil Blas*, January 12, 1903, à propos of this same opera he writes: "Comme celui qui chercher a d'insondables symboles dans cette action j'aime à y voir une humanité que Vincent d'Indy n'a revêtue de symbole que pour rendre plus profond cet éternel divorce entre la Beauté et la Vulgarité des foules." He writes of Strauss "as perhaps the most original musician of young Germany. He resembles, at one and the same time, Liszt by his remarkable virtuosity in the art of conducting and Berlioz by his employment of literary themes to support his music." "Heldenleben," he says, "is a series of pictures, it is even cinematography. But it must be conceded that a man who can construct such a work with such continuity of thought is little short of a genius."

In a few short sentences Debussy has drawn some vivid pen-pictures of individuals. Strauss is one of them: "he is tall, and has the ingenuous and decided manner of those great explorers who have made their way through the territories of savage tribes with a smile on their faces. For the purpose of rousing a civilised public it is as well to possess a little of this particular manner. All the same his forehead is that of a musician, but his eyes and features are those of a 'superman'; this last expression is borrowed from his instructor in energy, Nietszche." Herr Weingartner reminds Debussy "of a brand new knife; his gestures partake of a quasi-rectilinear eloquence; then all of a sudden his arms make relentless signals which evoke a bellowing from the trombones and drive the cymbals distracted. This makes a great impression and seems allied to necromancy. The public hardly knows how it can adequately express its enthusiasm."

Grieg's music gives him "the charming and bizarre sensation of eating a pink bonbon stuffed with snow." He notices how the Norwegian composer conducts the orchestra with a nervous minutiæ of detail, discovering and underlining nuances and distributing emotional effects with untiring attention.

These few examples, together with others scattered through the opening chapters of this volume, will suffice to give an idea of M. Debussy's versatile critical powers. His criticisms were, as he had intended them to be when taking the part of musical critic, "des impressions sincères et loyalement

ressenties." As to matter and manner, they were always interesting and entertaining. With wide and broad outlook he steered clear of affectation and pedantry. And with M. Croche as stalking-horse the personal note was skilfully avoided.

In these days of rapid motion, wireless telegraphy, and aerial transit, even phases of thought and art participate in the general acceleration, inasmuch as their nomenclature partakes of the celerity extant. When Wagner's star appeared in the musical firmament, in spite of the ferment of conflicting opinions, a somewhat general concurrence was given to the designation of his art as Music of the Future. In his case only a passing echo is left of the clash of contending criticisms. In the midst of the dust and noise raised in the glare of the present by the work of certain contemporary composers, the sound of distant bells may be heard proclaiming in silvern accents the advent of the Music of To-morrow. As yet to only a minority does this delicate phantom peal render itself audible. But as the morrow never delays its coming, so there are signs in this hurrying century of the speedy recognition of this near future for many French composers, prominent among whom stands Claude Debussy. This is not an age of giants. One no longer sights their herculean stature among the followers of any art. Yet in and out of the crowded precincts of music's territory some striking figures arrest the eye. Debussy walks solitary and apart. Down the path he has trodden

none may closely follow. But some who are known not to be imitators, while recognising his unique position, have set their faces in a similar direction and, keeping him in sight, proceed by other byways towards the same distant horizon. How far he may travel onwards, to what extent his migrations may lead those who watch his course, it is premature to prophesy. Like all pioneers, he is in advance of his age. In France an ever-increasing band of his admirers repudiate conjecture as to his merits and fame. Outside his native country his renown is steadily increasing. His art, fast rooted in the soil of tradition, has put forth new shoots; it possesses therefore the best qualifications for ensuring endurance and long life. In one of his articles on Beethoven he says: "The right lesson to be learnt from him is not to hold fast to ancient formulas, neither is it necessary to follow in the tracks of his earlier footsteps, but it is of greater importance to look out of open windows to the free sky beyond." This unrestricted outlook has given vitality to Debussy's work. From his vantage-ground of vision he has glanced far and wide. And like Novalis he has been attracted by a "high light-blue Flower"; on it his gaze has been long riveted. This unwearying Quest of the Ideal will undoubtedly lead him to still higher flights of imagination and thought. "The Knights are lying dead on the Graal's Highway" he sings in his beautiful Prose lyrique *De Rêve;* nevertheless he passes them by and hastens on, ever eager for fresh achievements.

It may be drawing on futurity and stealing a march on Time, but it is almost a foregone conclusion that some future historian of musical events and incidents, referring to Claude-Achille Debussy's compositions and to the contention to which they gave rise, may find these words of an Irish contemporary poet both useful and appropriate :

> " Something that the little breed of earth-moles
> In their day have scoffed at,
> And in their despite, has lived !
> For lo, a song
> Tho' made of nothing more
> Than wind or flame
> Is indestructible.* "

* Seosamh Campbell.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY'S WORKS

1880. La Belle au bois dormant. (Dupont.)
1884. L'Enfant Prodigue. (Durand.)
1889. Printemps: Suite symphonique. (Durand.)
1889. Petite suite: piano duet. (Durand.)
„ Rêverie. (Fromont.)
1890. Suite Bergamesque. (Fromont.)
„ Nocturnes pour orchestre. (Fromont.)
„ Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire. (Durand.)
1891. Arabesques I. II. (Durand.)
„ Ballade Slave. Fromont.
„ Valse Romantique. (Fromont.)
„ Danse: Tarentelle Styrienne. (Hamelle.)
1893. La Demoiselle élue (D. G. Rossetti), poème lyrique pour voix de femmes, soli, chœur et orchestre. (Durand.)
1895. Proses lyriques. (Fromont.)
„ Chansons de Bilitis. (Fromont.)
„ Quatuor à cordes. (Durand.)
1901. Angelus. (Hamelle.)
„ Trois mélodies. (Fromont.)
„ Pour le Piano. (Fromont.)
1902. Marche Ecossaise. (Fromont.)
„ Paysage Sentimentale. (Dupont.)
„ Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune. (Durand.)
„ Pelléas et Mélisande, Drame lyrique en 5 actes et 12 tableaux de Maurice Maeterlinck. (Durand.)
1903. Fêtes Galantes: 1er recueil. (Fromont.)
„ Ariettes oubliées. (Durand.)

1903. Les Cloches. (Durand.)
„ Mandoline. (Durand.)
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